

REPORT

EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND OUTCOMES OF NAL'IBALI READING CLUBS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

From June to November 2019, JET Education Services (JET) conducted an evaluation of Nal'ibali reading clubs (RCs). The evaluation surveyed and visited selected reading club leaders (RCLs) of clubs that are still operating, and also surveyed and interviewed RCLs of clubs that are no longer running.

RCs are a core component of the Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment (RFE) campaign. They offer opportunities for children to meet and enjoy reading in safe, relaxed and inclusive spaces that promote reading for pleasure through provision of diverse reading materials, some of them in the children's home languages.

Ideally, RCs should be run by skilled adults who are passionate about books and reading, who respect children and enjoy spending time with them, and who plan activities to take place at RC sessions. Children should attend RC sessions because they want to be there.

The theory of change (ToC) for RCs is as follows:

IF adults who love reading and working with children are trained and they register RCs, recruit children and meet in a safe and nurturing environment at least once a week¹, where they read aloud to children, provide opportunities for children to handle text and take books home to read, play games and sing, and guide children in talking and writing about books that have been read, using the children's home languages and multilingual reading resources, **THEN** children will become lifelong readers with increased confidence in reading, writing and speaking in their mother tongue and in English, and reading for enjoyment will become part of everyday life. Because they are readers, children will enjoy engaging with any text, and be more equipped and confident to engage with schoolbooks, which is likely to increase their chances of success in school.

Approach and methodology

The overarching question for the evaluation was: What are the most effective and cost-effective things Nal'ibali can do to support quality and sustainability of reading clubs?

To answer this key question, the following sub-questions were posed:

1. What are the factors that lead to the formation of reading clubs and influence their membership?

¹ Gardner and Rebar (2019) draw from the field of psychology to explain that habit reinforces behavior, therefore clubs that meet at least once a week can reinforce children's reading habits.



2. What are the factors that motivate children’s and adults’ participation in reading clubs?
3. What are the characteristics, conditions and practices that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs?
4. What are the factors, characteristics, conditions and practices that support or inhibit reading club longevity and sustainability?
5. To what extent are reading clubs improving access to reading materials for children and adults participating in the reading clubs?
6. How, if at all, are reading clubs influencing literacy habits, motivation to read and self-efficacy and confidence of children and adults participating in the reading clubs?

The evaluation was **formative, learning oriented and utilisation focused** as it was intended to inform planning and budgeting for 2020 and beyond to support implementation of effective and long running RCs. The evaluation was collaborative, and JET and Nal’ibali worked closely to agree on the design of the evaluation and the instruments to be used for collecting data. There was also critical engagement with preliminary findings before the final report was written to improve interpretation of results.

A sequential, explanatory, mixed method design comprising telephonic surveys, site visits and qualitative telephonic interviews was adopted to enrich our understanding of RCs and how they are run. A random sample of 1 029 RCs with a lower margin of error of 2.406% was drawn from a population of 2 706 active RCs to achieve a representative sample of 343 surveys. The following table summarises the research methods and target respondents as well as achieved samples:

Research method and target respondents	Achieved sample
Telephonic survey of active ² RCLs	349
Telephonic survey of inactive RCL	50
RC site visits	25
Qualitative telephone interview of inactive RCLs	10

Survey data was collected using structured questionnaires with mostly closed ended questions which were translated into Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho, all of the languages spoken by 3% or more of the survey population. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview and focus group guides as well as a RC session observation tool.

Quantitative data was analysed using Stata version 14.2 to conduct descriptive analysis, and a quality framework developed for this evaluation was utilised to analyse quantitative data to determine the quality of RCs. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis.

A cost analysis was conducted using the ingredients method to determine the cost of interventions to improve quality and promote sustainability.

² Active RCs are RCs that are still running while inactive RCs are reading clubs that were once registered and were running but stopped running for various reasons.



Nal'ibali supports three types of RCs that vary according to how they are recruited and supported by Nal'ibali:

1. **Core campaign RCs** are recruited through a partnership approach which includes partner recruitment, training, and support and mentoring to establish the RC. Some of the RCs, but not all, receive Nal'ibali reading supplements³ and infrequent visits from Nal'ibali staff.
2. **Special projects RCs** are established with dedicated staff and funding. They receive training and mentoring, weekly visits from Nal'ibali Story Sparkers⁴ (SSs), Nal'ibali reading supplements, and hanging libraries with books.
3. **Online registration RCs** register via the Nal'ibali website or contact centre. The clubs generally have not received any training and are less likely to receive reading materials from Nal'ibali.

Evaluation results are presented for the entire sample as well as by type of RC. Because the sample is random and representative the results for the full sample are generalisable to the broader population of RCs. However, results disaggregated by the types of RCs are not generalisable.

Key findings and discussion

The findings presented in this section are based on the following samples:

- 349 active RCL surveys,
- 50 inactive RCL surveys,
- 25 RC site visits, and
- 10 interviews with inactive RCLs.

Establishment of RCs

How are reading clubs formed?

- Nal'ibali training is a key catalytic factor in the formation of RCs – reported by 53% of active reading club leaders (RCLs) and 64% of inactive RCLs.
- Many RCLs were already working with children
- Most RCs are teacher run and meet in schools (49%) and preschools/crèches (18%). Special projects RCs are mostly run in schools.

Who leads reading clubs?

- 90% of reading club leaders (RCLs) in active clubs are women.

³ A bilingual newspaper with stories literacy activities, reading and reading club tips and support produced by Nal'ibali and distributed to reading clubs. 15 editions are produced annually.

⁴ Nal'ibali staff members who supported special projects through weekly visits and worked with children to spark a love of RFE



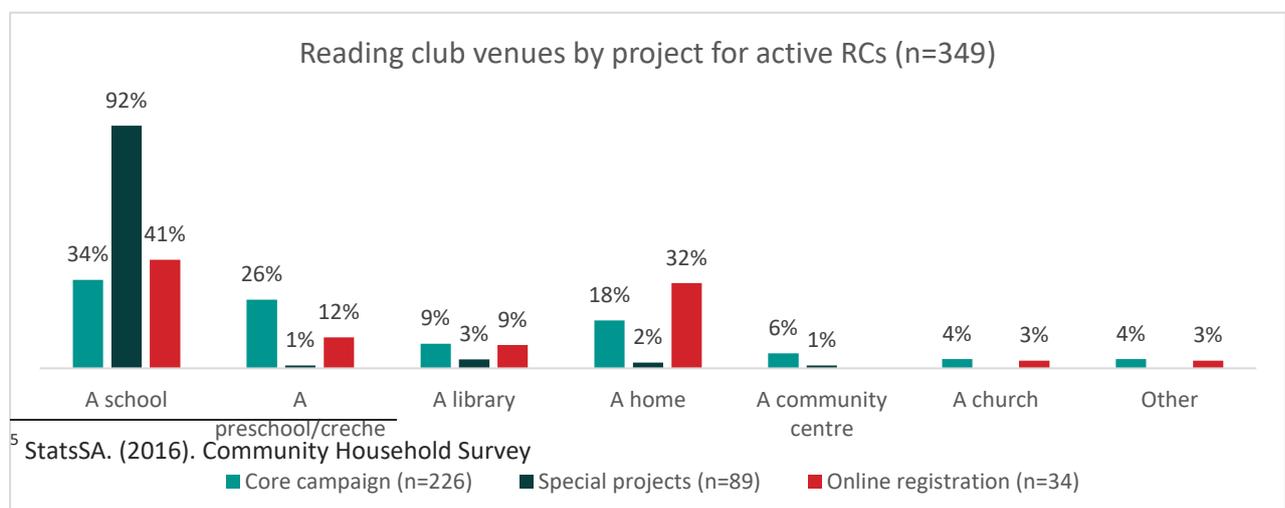
- 80% of the RCLs are between the ages of 30 and 59, and only 3% are younger than 20.
- 89% of RCLs are black African who are linguistically diverse; 8% are coloured, 2% are white, and 1% are Indian. The linguistic diversity of RCLs enables the use of 11 languages in RCs – English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati and isiNdebele.
- 27% of RCLs have a certificate and 55% have postsecondary qualifications (diploma, higher certificate, undergraduate degree and postgraduate degree) as their highest qualification. In this regard, RCLs are better qualified than the South African public in general as only 12% of South African Adults have post-secondary qualifications⁵.
- The most common profession among RCLs is primary school teacher (33%)
- A minority of RCLs are parents of children under 15, between 24% and 30% of RCLs in each club type.
- Adult volunteers assist in RCs with literacy support and development activities and help lower the adult: child ratio in overcrowded classrooms. This assistance helps as the quality threshold for the adult: child ratio in RCs of 1:15 is met by 63% of RCs.
- Relying on volunteers to run RCs in communities where there is high unemployment is challenging and this could help explain why only 36% of volunteers never or sometimes help. Child volunteers are not helping at all, yet their presence in classrooms in school based RCs would enable them to assist the RCLs with activities.
- Parental involvement in RCs is limited and reasons for this provided by some parents at focus groups and RCLs in interviews are parents' lack of awareness about RC activities and the fact that parents are at work when RCs are run.

Where are reading clubs meeting?

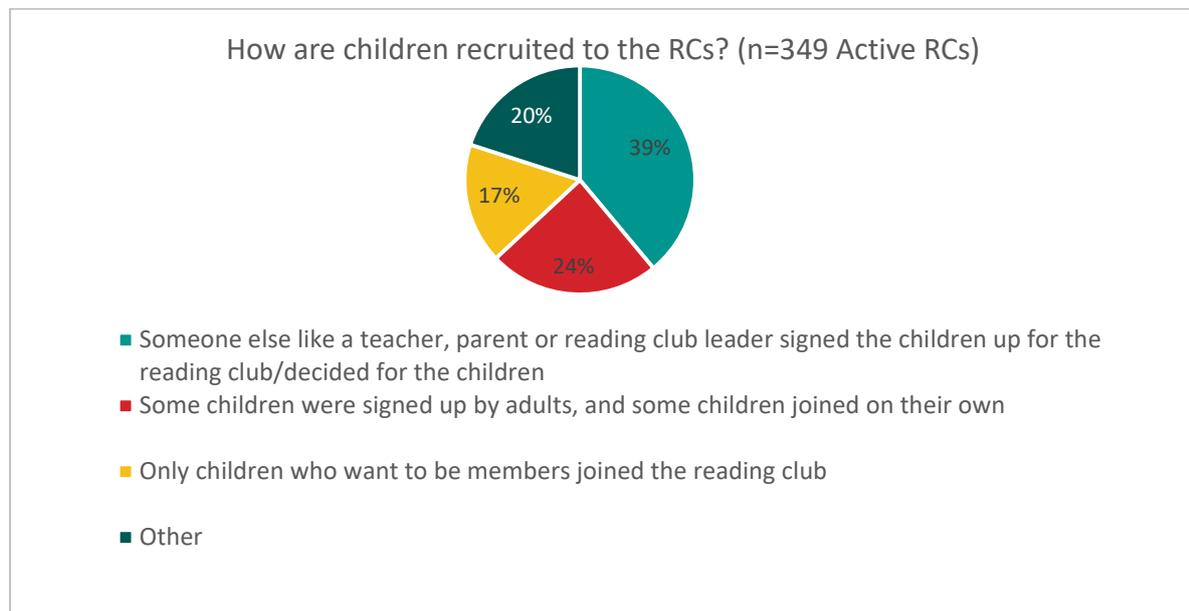
Reading clubs are meeting mostly in schools and a variety of other venues as reflected in the figure below.

How are children recruited to RCs?

Although children in 39% of active RCs and 42% of inactive RCs were recruited by an adult. RCLs from



72% of active RCs said that children attended RC sessions consistently with few absences, while 19% indicated that children attend mostly with more frequent absences.



At the site visit observations, all children seemed to be enjoying the RC sessions and those who participated in focus groups confirmed this.

How often and for how long do reading clubs meet?

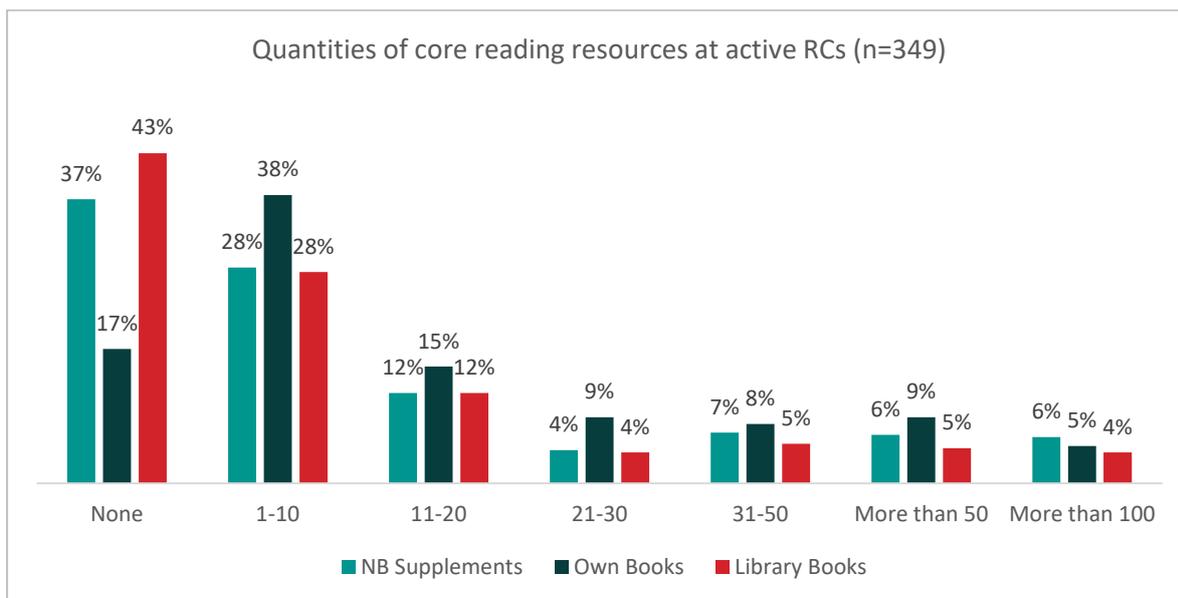
97 % of RCs meet a least once a week, which is positive for reinforcing the effects of RCs and potentially influencing children’s reading habits. However, only 66% of RCs meet for at least 45 minutes each time. Only 52% of the special projects RCs that meet in schools meet for at least 45 minutes, and the rest meet for much shorter periods, suggesting that there are constraints for school-based RCs working in a structured school day with its curriculum demands to meeting the minimum threshold for duration.

Access to resources

What kind of resources and reading materials are available?

An intended outcome of the Nal’ibali RCs is for adults and children to have access to a wide variety of relevant, engaging reading materials in all South African languages. RCs reported that they had a variety of reading resources including story cards, posters, website stories, read aloud collections, magazines and newspapers. The core resources that every RC should ideally have are Nal’ibali (NB) reading supplements, own books and library books. The quantities of these resources in RCs are reflected in the following figure.





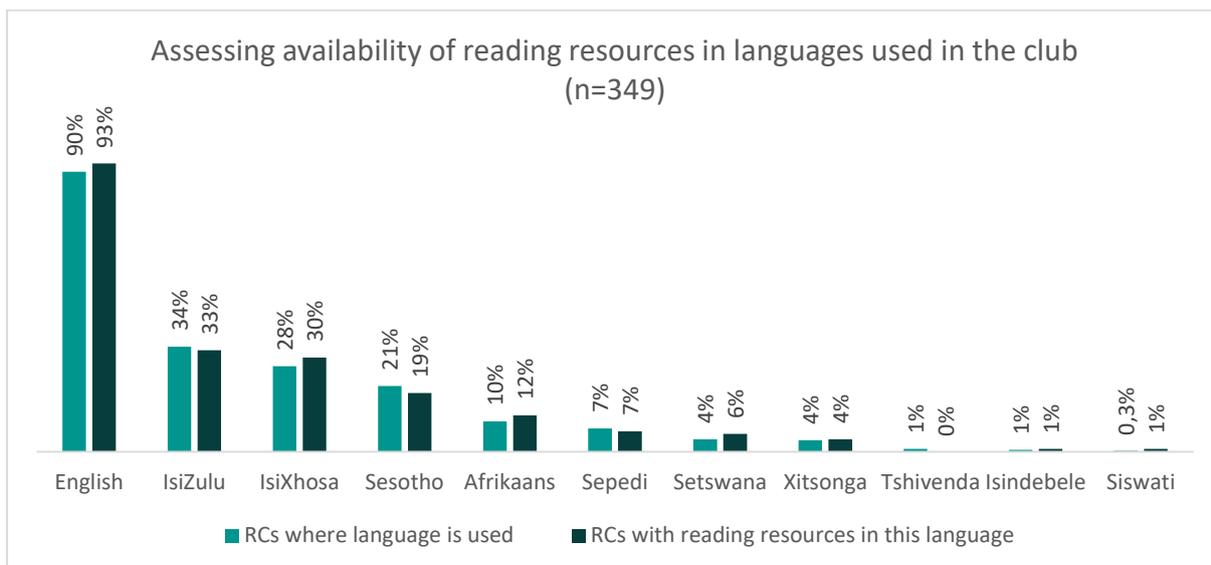
Generally, there are diverse reading materials available but, quantities are not optimal, given research evidence that 20 books in the home can predict future academic success⁶. Children in Nal'ibali RCs are less likely to have access to books at home, which RCs can mitigate, yet only 31% of the RCs have more than 20 of their own books and only 18% have more than 20 library books.

Are the materials in the languages spoken at the reading club?

Resources are predominantly in English, and inroads are being made in the provision of reading materials in the home languages spoken in the RCs, as highlighted in the figure below. The supplement is the most accessible bilingual resource that can be accessed bi-weekly. All clubs that use English have reading materials in English and there is a high congruence of home language reading materials in clubs where these languages are used, with the exception of Tshivenda.

⁶ Evans et al. (2010) Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations



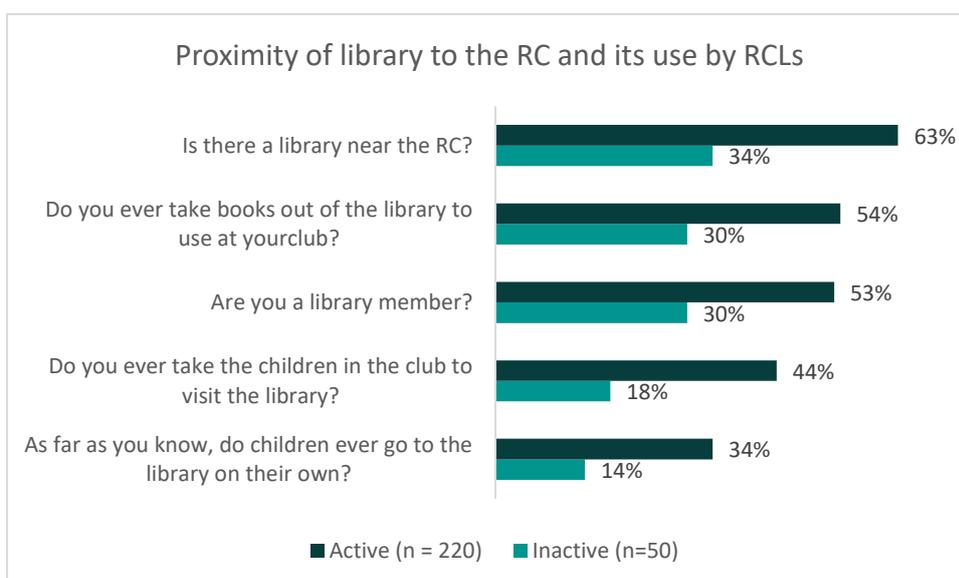


Access to reading materials in children’s home languages and using children’s home languages in clubs potentially have positive effects. Having reading materials in children’s languages could encourage more club activities in those languages, in the same way that using children’s home languages in clubs could promote active sourcing of home language reading materials in clubs.

Where is the material sourced?

Nal’ibali and libraries are the biggest sources of reading resources. As observed at site visits, schools with well stocked libraries also contribute significantly to increasing quantities and diversifying reading resources.

A proportionally higher percentage of active RCs have a library near them than had inactive RCs and utilisation of the library by active RCLs is proportionally higher than it was for inactive RCLs. Utilisation of libraries by both active and inactive RCLs provides children with alternative access to reading materials other than the RCs.



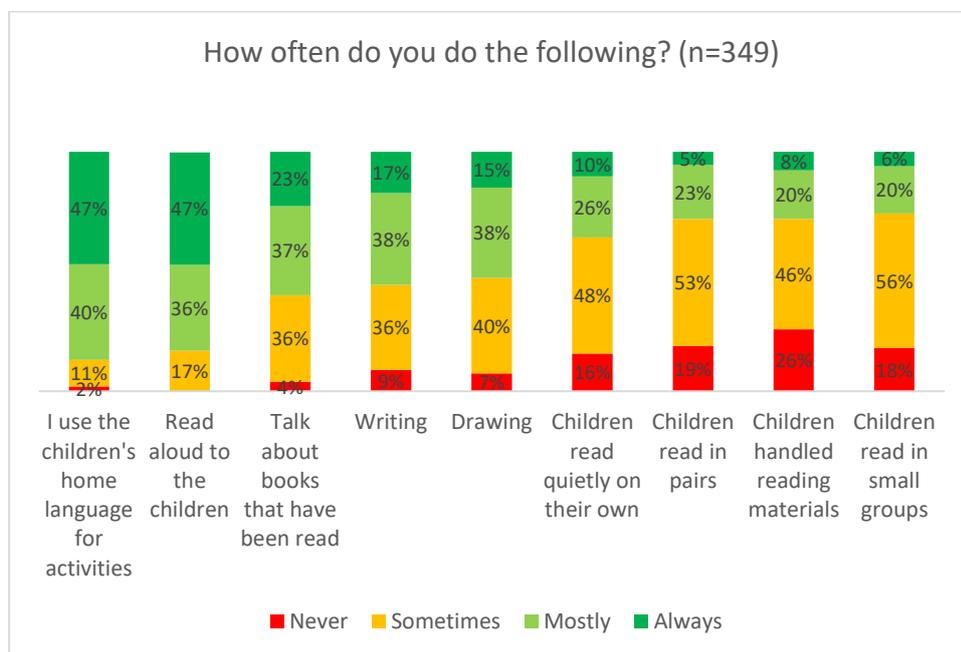
How often is material refreshed?

While 72% of all RCLs reported that they refresh their own or library books at least twice a year, 21% of RCLs who indicated they have their own books never refresh their own books, and 38% of those who mentioned they have library books indicated that they never refresh library books⁷. The high percentage of RCs that refresh their books is positive as this can help provide a variety of reading materials that children use and eventually also increase the low volumes of reading materials at clubs.

Practice

For the purpose of analysis of reading club practice, a distinction was made between essential practice (reading aloud, children handling reading materials, children reading in pairs, in small groups and quietly on their own) and supporting practice (talking about books that have been read, writing and drawing).

RC practice is significantly aligned with what is promoted by Nal'ibali for the essential practice of reading aloud to children, using the children's home languages, and the supporting practice of talking about books that have been read, writing and drawing. There are challenges however, particularly with promoting children's independent engagement with text which is happening mostly and always to a limited extent, as shown in the figure.



⁷ This question may have been misunderstood to mean school library books, and the response here may be referring to restocking of the school library. The 'never' response could be signaling that the school library never restocks.



The most likely reason why RCLs are not letting children engage with text is that they are not aware that they ought to be prioritizing this practice:

- Only two (0,6%) RCs indicated that they do not have any of the three core resources. However, these two clubs, with 20 and 11 children respectively, have enough story cards, story power guides and newspapers to enable all activities where children can engage independently with text.
- Independent engagement with text by children mostly or always is limited even though 91% RCLs plan for RC sessions, which means they are not planning for these activities.
- Duration of RC meetings does not reflect a marked difference in children engaging independently with text. Even RCLs who indicated they meet for longer than 2 hours are not meeting thresholds for ideal practice for children engaging independently with text.

This strongly suggests that the requirements for ideal practice in children’s independent engagement with text are not explicit to RCLs.

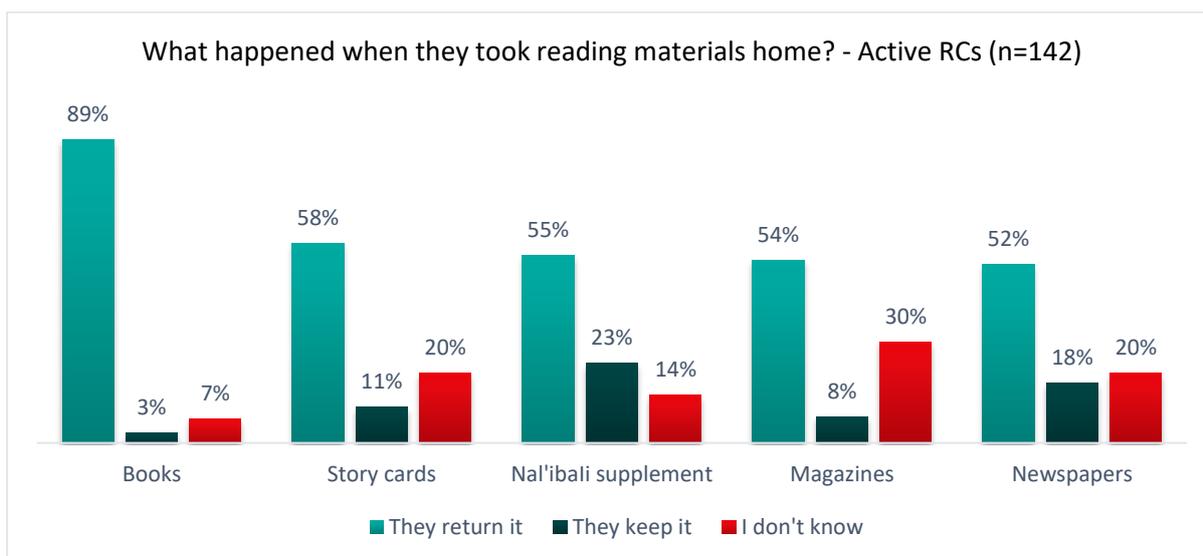
The lending of books to children seems to be affected by the limited availability of resources – only 41% of the RCLs lend children books, and this varies significantly by type of project, with core campaign and online registration RCs lending the least (32% of core campaign RCs are lending books, and 47% of online registration RCLs are lending books). As shown in the following table, RCs with more than 20 supplements and more than 30 own books are more likely to let children take reading resources home, suggesting that greater quantities of RCs may promote lending.

Quantity	Supplements		Own books	
	Take home	Do not take home	Take home	Do not take home
1-10	27(28%)	71(72%)	36(27%)	95(73%)
11-20	16(39%)	25(61%)	18(34%)	35(66%)
21-30	12(80%)	3(20%)	11(37%)	19(63%)
31-50	16(70%)	7(30%)	16(59%)	11(41%)
51-100	14(64%)	8(36%)	17(57%)	13(43%)
More than 100	15(71%)	6(29%)	10(59%)	7(41%)

Remarkably, in the clubs where RCLs are lending children books, 89% of the children return the books, which is positive and should be used for advocacy to encourage more lending of books.

The high return rate of books borrowed by children is reflected in the figure overleaf.





Quality of RCs

In order to understand the quality of RCs, a matrix considering membership of RCs, dosage, access to resources and essential and supporting practice was developed, and minimum quality thresholds were defined for each focus area. Quality RCs:

- Have an adult:child ratio of 1:15 or lower (membership),
- Meet weekly for at least 45 minutes each meeting (dosage),
- Have two types of reading resources: supplements, own or library books; get new books of their own or library books at least twice a year and have at least one writing or drawing paper and writing tool (access to resources).
- Use the children's home language, read aloud, let children engage with text independently mostly and always (essential practice), and
- Let children take books home, talk about books read, let children write and draw mostly or always (supporting practice).

Clubs can be weak, developing, struggling, good or excellent depending on the extent to which they meet the threshold for the different dimensions of quality listed above. There are no weak clubs and a minority of struggling and developing clubs – 65% of the clubs are good or excellent as shown in the following table.

Quality of RCs	# RCs
Weak club	0
Struggling Club	25 (7%)
Developing Club	95 (27%)
Good Club	148 (42%)
Excellent Club	81 (23%)
Total	349 (100%)



Online registration clubs have a higher proportion of struggling and developing clubs compared to core campaign and special projects RCs, which could signal that training and resourcing make a quality difference.

Outcomes

Most RCLs (73% active) believe that the RFE approach is effective, and 71% active and 64% inactive RCLs indicated they would encourage other people to start RCs. Forty five percent of active RCLs indicated they had encouraged someone to start a RC, and they knew of 38 RCs that had been established because of this.

In interviews, RCLs highlighted the effects of RCs on children, including motivation to read; improved confidence levels; improved discipline; enjoying reading for pleasure; improved creativity; and improved reading/writing skills. The RCLs also reported effects for themselves, including reading for enjoyment; better relationships with children; better understanding of children; and improved confidence levels.

Sustainability

- 62% of the inactive clubs surveyed stopped running within a year and a further 30% within 24 months, suggesting that RCs are most vulnerable to closing within the first two years.
- Special projects RCs become inactive when the SS withdraws from the school after the Nal'ibali programme comes to an end.

Cost of implementing interventions to improve quality and sustainability

Based on the findings, some activities to improve the quality and sustainability are costed and prioritised in the table overleaf.



Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Training	Training potential RCL	R1 654.00	1	Full training cost incurred by Nal'ibali at cost of training in Nal'ibali cost data	Training is associated with good and excellent clubs. This training will capacitate committed RCLs to run RCs effectively and improve sustainability. The training can draw on experiences of RC in the two months they have been running a club to give concrete guidance.
Resources	Supplements for startup kit for RC	R90.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R3.00 Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	Home language resource that has stories that can be used to start RCs. Children can have a resource to handle and enjoy at the new club.
	Read Aloud Collections for startup kit for RC	R120.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R4.00. Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	New resource with stories to increase diversity and quantity of reading resources at the newly established club.
Communication	Communication	R3.42	1	The total annual budget for SMSs based on 4 800 Nal'ibali clubs is R16 412. If this is divided by 4 800 clubs it gives us R3.42 per reading club	For ongoing support to RCLs that have indicated they are feeling neglected and gathering information from RCs on whether they have supplements so they can be included on the distribution list if they do not have supplements.
Reading resources	Supplements for registered clubs	R1 350.00	1	Assuming 30 supplements per club for 15 editions @ R3.00/supplement	Critical resource in children's home languages which is being taken home and being read to parents by some children. Supplements help with providing access to reading resources in homes.
	Story books	R600.00	1	10 story books per club per year@ R60.00/story book	Provides additional and diverse resources to RCs. There are very low quantities of story books according to RCLs.
	Bilingual dictionaries	R232.00	3	A basic bilingual dictionary costs R116.00 and 2 will be supplied to each RC	Useful to have, but can be sourced elsewhere. A high proportion of RCs do not have them.
Other literacy development materials	Paper, crayons, and other writing materials	R200.00	1	Fixed amount of R200.00/club, based on Nal'ibali's calculations	Lack of this material limits implementation of interpretive actions which support practice - 30% RCs do not meet the threshold. Having these materials will help promote quality in this dimension.



Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Knowledge support to RCLs	Online training	R6.15	1	Based on the premise that a moderator/facilitator is needed for online training so that discussions are guided into learning sessions; It will also provide an opportunity for RCLs who have urgent queries to engage with a Nal'ibali staff member for guidance. This has been costed @R554.00/day for 12 months for ongoing support for 2 160 clubs	There is a demand for training mentioned in requests for Nal'ibali support, and online training reduces training costs. It can also provide ongoing knowledge support to RCLs who need to refresh their knowledge.
RCL session support RCLs	Child volunteers	R350.00	1	Assuming each club has a maximum of 5 children helping, and t-shirts cost R70.00 each	43 (78%) child volunteers in the 55 RCs with child volunteers never assist. T-shirts would acknowledge them as assistants and make them assist more. This is critical as 32 (39%) RCs do not meet the adult:child threshold.
Monitoring and support	Stipends for SSs	R894.00	1	Full cost of a SS per year per club divided by 52 weeks x2 is R144.00 plus the cost of transport @ R750.00/RC/year	Currently, SS run RCs become inactive when SS contracts end and a third to two thirds of school run RCs also become inactive when SSs leave. Having SSs provide continuous limited support after programme exit may help ensure sustainability.
Total cost of activities to improve quality and sustainability		R5 499,57			



South African Sign Language (SASL) RCs can be piloted at the costs in the table below based on the assumption that 10 RCs will be piloted.

Cost component	Total cost per annum per RC	Assumptions
Training	R2 854.00	We assume that the normal cost of Nal'ibali training of R1 654 is applicable and have added the cost of 2 interpreters @R3 000.00/day each x 2 days of training divided by 10 clubs which is R1 200 each to make R6 000.00
Reading resources	R2 500.00	10 SASL DVD book @ R250.00 each based on price sourced from a sign language development organisation that has developed DVDs.
	R600.00	10 picture books estimated at R60.00/book
Total	R5 954.00	

Conclusion and recommendations

Relative to the national content as evidenced in the National Reading Survey (SABDC, 2016), the impact of the Nal'ibali RFE campaign and RCs in developing mostly African and female role models who promote reading among children from low socio-economic contexts cannot be underestimated and improvements to the quality and sustainability of RCs will only increase the impact. The results from the evaluation have given rise to the following recommendations, grouped by the relevant evaluation criteria:

Recommendations for establishment of RCs

1. Continue to focus recruitment strategy towards people who work with children and in places like libraries that have resources, given the scarcity of reading resources among clubs.
2. To reduce high costs of materials at initial training, offer starter kits of up to 30 supplements and read out collections to each trainee who wants to go and start a RC.
3. Given the high inactivity of clubs in the first year, establish buddy system that links up RCLs in in geographic clusters to enable easy collaboration between RCLs in a way that will enable children and RCLs awareness of RCs within a specific radius so that children can join another RC in their community if their RC shuts down.
4. Given that some RCLs have indicated that they have successfully embedded the RFE approach into their classrooms, engage providers of initial teacher education and in-service



training to discuss the mainstreaming of the RFE approach to teaching reading. If this gets any traction the approach will be used in many schools and crèches.

5. Consider piloting RCs with 10 organisations working with deaf children or with schools for the deaf to extend the reach of RFE and RCs. This would both introduce a new language and address the needs of marginalised, poor deaf children.

Recommendations for access to reading materials

1. Given the large proportions of RCs without supplements, improve targeting and delivery of supplements to RCs.
2. Based on the limited quantities of reading resources in RCs, continue the practice of sending a pack of 10 story books to new reading clubs and extend it as a once off to all active clubs. Aim for diverse packs that can be swapped, while considering economies of scale.
3. Because website stories are being underutilised, and there are very few reading resources enabling children to independently engage with text, negotiate partnerships with city libraries to provide printing tokens to RCLs to print website stories from the library.
4. To pilot SASL RCs, provide a set of 10 different SASL DVD and story books to each pilot SASL site, providing different sets that will enable swapping that leads to refreshment of resources at agreed times.

Recommendations for practice

1. Update the Module 3 manual *Run a reading club* in line with the quality matrix to specify quality dimensions and thresholds.
2. To provide ongoing training support, investigate blended learning to try and address the knowledge needs of RCLs in a core, sustainable way.
3. Align the RC theory of change with the quality matrix.
4. Appoint a moderator/facilitator for online training or reskill internal capacity to moderate discussions on the online module platform. A SS may be best placed to do this.

Recommendations for quality

1. Given that writing and drawing now form part of the quality matrix, and Nal'ibali does not provide drawing and writing resources, consider providing writing and drawing materials for supporting practice.
2. Promote active involvement of RCLs in the established buddy system so that they can also swap books as a way of refreshing their reading resources.
3. Emphasise and be explicit about ideal practice in training.
4. Arrange bi-annual monitoring and support visits by SSs to special projects RCs that have graduated from the project.
5. Continue using various forms of communication like SMS, phone, email, WhatsApp and newsletters to reach out to clubs and support them – all clubs.



Recommendations for sustainability

1. To help raise the quality of struggling and developing clubs, consider twinning RCLs from good and excellent clubs with those from struggling and developing clubs for tip sharing, encouragement and where possible distance and resources permitting, modelling of ideal practice.
2. Build on past experience on this to negotiate possibilities for volunteer stipends with Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Community Works Programme (CWP) and the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education Training Authority (SETA).

Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

1. Because adult volunteers do not assist always at RCs, Nal'ibali should include a question on the frequency of adult volunteers' assistance at clubs in their monitoring tools or surveys to improve understanding of the actual adult:child ratios at clubs.
2. The high variance between survey and monitoring data on clubs that meet weekly or 2-3 times a week warrants closer attention to monitoring data for these options to establish causes of variance.
3. In future research, a clear distinction needs to be made on what is referred by library as school libraries and community libraries can be conflated in responses as seemed to be the case in the survey.



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Acronyms

CATI	Computer Assisted Telephonic Interview System
CDW	Community Development Works
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EC	Eastern Cape
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
FG	Focus Groups
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FL	Funda Leader
FS	Free State
GT	Gauteng
HCI	Hosken Consolidated Investments
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LM	Literacy Mentor
LP	Limpopo
LSM	Living Standards Measure
MP	Mpumalanga
NB	Nal'ibali
NC	Northern Cape
NRS	National Reading Survey
NW	North- West
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study
POI	Post Observation Interview
PRAESA	Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa
QC	Quality Check
RC	Reading Club



RCL	Reading Club Leader
RFE	Reading for Enjoyment
SABDC	South African Book Development Council
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SLED	Sign Language Education and Development
SMS	Short Message Service
SPS	Story Powered School
SSs	Story Sparkers
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ToC	Theory of Change
TRS	Topline Research Solutions
VFG	Volunteer Focus Group
VW	Volkswagen
WC	Western Cape



READING CLUBS EVALUATION REPORT

1 Introduction, background and context

1.1 Introduction

In May 2019, NaI'ibali appointed JET Education Services to conduct an evaluation of the quality, sustainability and outcomes of the NaI'ibali reading clubs (RCs). The study would explore these dimensions through engagement with NaI'ibali active clubs, i.e. RCs that were running in 2019, and inactive RCs - RCs that were no longer running. The purpose of the evaluation was to investigate:

- How RCs are established and what their membership is;
- Where RCs are meeting and frequency and duration of meetings;
- The availability and quantity of reading resources as well as other literacy development resources;
- Practices in RCs during reading club (RC) meetings, to establish what is happening in RCs and how this aligns with what NaI'ibali promotes at training and in their literature and in engagement with reading club leaders (RCLs);
- The extent to which RCs are staying active over time, how long it takes for RCs to become inactive, and the reasons for becoming inactive; and
- The outcomes for adults and children who belong to RCs.

The evaluation was conducted from June to November 2019, and this report discusses how the evaluation was conceptualised and implemented and what the findings are. Recommendations for improving quality, sustainability and effectiveness are also provided. An overview of the report structure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Report structure

Report section	Section focus
1	Introduction, overview of literature review and description of the reading for enjoyment campaign.
2	Overview of literature and document review focussing on the theoretical underpinnings of literacy development, international and regional research on reading clubs and their outcomes and describing the NaI'ibali reading for enjoyment campaign.
3	Methodology, presenting the evaluation criteria and questions, the conceptual framework for the evaluation, the sampling strategy, data collection and analysis, and methodological limitations.



Report section	Section focus
4	Key findings, looking at establishment of RCs, access to resources, practice in RCs, quality of RCs, sustainability of RCs and effectiveness of the RCs.
5	Synthesis of findings, looking at the tenets and effects of the three types of RCs and the cost of supporting quality, effective and sustainable reading clubs
6	Conclusions and recommendation per evaluation criterion

1.2 Perspectives on literacy development, reading clubs, and outcomes

The section summarises salient points from the literature review that was conducted to contextualise and benchmark the Nal’ibali RCs in relation to other RC initiatives. The definition of a RC is teased out, and examples of a few other RC initiatives are provided. Some key principles of RCs that make them successful and their outcomes are discussed. The section concludes with a discussion of the state of literacy among children in South Africa to contextualise the significance of the Nal’ibali RCs in a national context.

RCs are a primary space through which children can assert control over their own literacy. However, what constitutes a RC has no fast definition. Research discusses “book clubs” (Gardner, 2002), “reading groups” (Scothern, 2000; Train, 2002), “reading buddies” (IPA, 2012) and “reading clubs” (NPI, 2004; Dynia, Piasta & Justice, 2015), with varying or overlapping meanings. Part of the bane as well as the boon of grassroots initiatives is that they often call themselves what they wish, based on their own understanding, without adhering to dictionary or research definitions.

RCs are facilitated sessions which broaden the scope of literacy development activities and deemphasise assessment. RCs have been developed internationally as a strategy to improve literacy, increase engagement of children, cultivate a lifelong love of reading, strengthen equity and social cohesion, and provide rewarding volunteer engagements. Examples of other RC initiatives are provided below:

- Onukaogu (1999) discusses a grassroots initiative for reading clubs in Nigeria, in which school teachers and university faculty facilitated opportunities for primary school children to engage meaningfully with literacy outside the formal structure of classwork, with the aim of enhancing critical thinking, questioning and self-esteem through group-based reading and writing activities.
- The “We Love Reading” campaign⁸ operates in 13 countries, with a core mandate of increasing reading levels among children aged 4-10. The model works through community-based volunteers who are trained to hold “reading sessions” in public spaces, essentially creating a “library” where books are read aloud to children in order to foster an early interest in and love of books and reading. The campaign also focuses on authorship, developing a

⁸ Information is drawn from the We Love Reading website: <http://www.weloveread.org/#/page/home>



series of 32 children's books through collaborations with local writers, illustrators and designers.

- Curdt-Christiansen (2009) discusses kidsREAD, a National Library Board Singapore initiative which engaged low income learners of ages 4-8 in a volunteer led reading programme. Finding that children emerged from the clubs as more confident independent readers, the programme was extended to five years with the objectives of leveraging partners to promote a love of reading and good reading habits; improving equity, social cohesion and racial harmony in Singapore; enhancing the quality of the lives of children and their families; and providing enriching and rewarding volunteer activities.

RCs enable communities to construct and make use of spaces for leisure reading and particularly to introduce such practices to children. RCs are also spaces that enable critical pedagogy, which allows readers as a group to construct and share a "mutual reading of the world" (Chapton, 2005: 9) that foregrounds the "agency, experience, context, identity and community" (Chapton, 2005: 12) of each member. In this way, Chapton sees RCs as a primary means through which not only literacy but also resilience is fostered.

For RCs to be effective, they need to have a range of reading resources in the appropriate language. Gambrell (2011) cited the challenge in obtaining relevant resources in the desired language as a primary challenge of RCs, in addition to drawing volunteers who speak the desired language. In addition, privileged members of society are more likely to participate in such groups. Fiore and Roman (2010) found that RCs were primarily accessed by learners who had parents with high levels of library use, more books at home and increased engagement in after school literacy activities; Becnel et al (2017) present research which added factors of motivation, finding that clubs were primarily attended by "strong, motivated readers" (Becnel et al., 2017: 4) who were motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as parents, prizes, their own enjoyment and being able to choose what they read. Participation in reading challenges and contests were found to be externally motivating factors in a few studies (see Kennedy & Bearne, 2009; Lockwood, 2012; The Reading Agency, 2015; Wood et al, 2015).

Gambrell (2011) likewise found that children are more motivated to read when they have opportunities to make choices about the material they read, as well as how they engage in and complete literacy tasks - in other words, when children are able to exhibit some control over what and how they are learning. Further factors Gambrell found to affect motivation include tasks and activities relevant to children's lives and access to a wide range of reading materials – however, children left on their own will make poor choices of reading material, often selecting text which is too difficult. In order to effectively select texts, children can benefit from learning tricks like the "five finger test", in which a learner puts their hand on the page and tries to read the five words their fingers are touching; if they can read four of the five on three different pages, the text is probably a good level for them (Smagorinsky, 2018).

In any community, reading for pleasure has been found to have positive benefits, ranging from academic achievement to personal development. Reading for pleasure has been associated with



academic achievement, learning gains (Moyer, 2007; the Reading Agency, 2015), a sense of community and social inclusion (Billington, 2015), increased community participation (empathy) (Mar et al, 2009; Mar et al, 2006), and understanding diversity (Moyer, 2007). In studying the reading habits of two groups of children of different socio-economic status, DJS Research for the Book Trust (2013) found that while for adults there was a strong link between income and frequency of recreational reading, for children class, and ability did not factor in reading enjoyment.

In 2006, South Africa participated in the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) for the first time, discovering that only 22% of Grade 5 learners were able to achieve at even a basic literacy level. The findings galvanised the education community to conduct a series of concerted conversations and increase efforts toward improving literacy which have resulted in some, but not the dramatically necessary, improvement. Ten years later in 2016, only 22% of Grade 4 learners were able to achieve at a basic literacy level (Howie et al, 2016).

In many respects, South Africa's continued struggle to advance literacy is not surprising. Internationally, children who achieved well on the PIRLS test attended well-resourced, safe and academically-oriented schools with a mix of demographics, particularly with regard to income. Their schools placed a high priority on reading instruction; they attended school and had access to nutritious meals; they had a positive attitude toward reading and had little difficulty reading online (PIRLS, 2016). In South Africa, children achieved higher mean scores when parents often read stories, sang songs, and played with and talked to children before they started school. In addition, having resources in the home such as books, the child having their own room, internet access, and better-educated parents with higher-level occupations were strongly associated with learner reading literacy achievement on the PIRLS 2016 test (Howie et al., 2016).

Most South African children grow up in environments far removed from these ideals. Of the learners who took the PIRLS 2016 examination, 70% had limited reading resources at home, and only about a third of schools in South Africa have any sort of library. At the instruction level, there are basic challenges in literacy education, often conflated by conflicts between the language of teaching and learning most prominent in schools and the linguistic capabilities of both teachers and the communities they serve. Sociocultural investigations into literacy reveal that the South African population may be disadvantaged by the dominance of written text in defining literacy; that children may experience strong disassociations between communalistic norms and practices of their communities such as *Ubuntu* and the individualism and competition-based achievement measures of school environments (McNamara, 1998); and that achievement in English as the dominant language of teaching and learning can lead to isolation or exclusion from their home communities, even as English continues to be perceived as the language with the highest social currency in South Africa (Rudwick, 2008).

Tackling the complex problem of literacy in South Africa remains one of the foremost goals of government and civil society. With such complex dynamics at the conversion of identity, culture, power, choice, history and education, it is difficult to ascertain what constitutes support for a "good" literacy culture for South Africa. However, one of the primary considerations includes aspects of



empowered choice of language, along with the development of spaces and contexts through which individual and social literacies can be advanced and practiced, leading to other positive developmental outcomes – dimensions which Nal’ibali addresses in its reading for enjoyment (RFE) campaign.

1.3 The reading for enjoyment campaign

The Nal’ibali RFE campaign focuses on sparking an interest in reading in response to the lack of reading in South African homes and communities. According to Nal’ibali (2018c: 3):

The South African childhood story is not a story that starts with “once upon a time”. It’s a story that starts with “hardly ever”. Hardly ever is a child read to at home by their caregiver.⁹ Hardly ever does their home have more than a few books in it.¹⁰ Hardly ever do they attend a preschool where the practitioners have a formal qualification to be there.¹¹ Hardly ever are they in a class at a school with fewer than 35 children.¹² Hardly ever have they learnt to read in their mother tongue before the language of instruction changes to English in Grade 4.¹³ Hardly ever do they receive what is required for them to become readers through their homes or indeed the formal education system.

The reality of the South African child is an indictment of the literacy habits of adults, as evidenced by the National Reading Survey (NRS) conducted by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) in 2016. The NRS survey found that the reading habits of South Africans are challenged by many factors including lack of or limited access to reading materials, attitudes and perceptions, geography, and socioeconomic status. The survey found that:

- Only 43% of South African people over age 16 read for leisure, a sharp decline from 65% in 2006. Reading came fifth as a leisure activity, after listening to the radio (79%), watching TV/DVDs/videos (78%), shopping/going to the mall (51%) and socialising at home (51%).
- Perceptions about the value of reading are quite low, with only 51% of the 2016 survey respondents believing that “reading increases your knowledge” and only 47% highlighting that “reading relaxes you”.
- Most South African households do not have books¹⁴: 58% of households do not have any books, 35% have 1-10 books, 4% have 11-20 books and 4% have 30 or more books. Households in rural areas (69%), and where the highest qualification of the respondent was primary schooling (77%) or no schooling (99%), were least likely to have books. Households

⁹ South Africa Book Development Council, 2016

¹⁰ Bloch, 2011

¹¹ Spaul et al, 2016

¹² Heckman J (2006). Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children. *Science*, 30, 1900-1902.

¹³ Krashen, S. (1993). *The Power of Reading* Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

¹⁴ The definition of books was any books that were not school or workbooks, magazines, comics, newspapers and religious books



at the lower end of the Living Standards Measure (LSM) were also unlikely to have books – 82% of respondents in LSM 1-3 and 64% in LSM 4-6 did not have any books.

- Despite the low availability of books in households, only 27% of the surveyed people indicated that they went to a library, and only 9% of these sat and read a book, while 7% borrowed or took out books.
- Of the 1 955 respondents (49%) who indicated they lived with children, 65% indicated they never read to children and only 35% read to their children (SABDC, 2016).

The reading challenges in households and their variation by social class are mirrored in the schooling system, where the persistently low performance of South African learners in regional and international benchmark tests like the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), PIRLS and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have highlighted that learners in low quintile schools generally perform more poorly than their counterparts in higher quintile schools in these assessments. Government policy and programmatic responses to the challenges of reading have not yielded as much improvement as required, but a positive outcome of the literacy challenge is the volume of non-state actors like Centre for the Book, Project Literacy, Family Literacy Project, READ, Read to Rise, Ripple Reading, Shine Literacy, WordWorks, and Nal’ibali, to name a few, that have responded to the call for action and are implementing interventions to improve children’s reading.

Against this backdrop, the Nal’ibali RFE campaign becomes relevant and critical. Nal’ibali (isiXhosa for “here’s the story”) was established in 2012 as a project housed within the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), in partnership with funding partner, the DG Murray Trust and media partner, Tiso Blackstar (JET, 2018). The Nal’ibali national campaign arose from the research and development work that PRAESA conducted in multilingual and early literacy education (Nal’ibali, n.d.a.) and was established to create a culture of reading for enjoyment in South Africa through making storytelling, reading and writing part of everyday life (Nal’ibali, 2018c).

Nal’ibali’s vision is “a literate South Africa in which all children and adults enjoy stories and books together as part of daily life, and use writing and reading in meaningful ways” and the goals are:

- *To create awareness of the important link between reading for enjoyment in home language and educational achievement.*
- *To inform and guide people and organisations on how to use reading for enjoyment for children’s literacy development.*
- *To create, support and help sustain reading clubs as a literacy promotion strategy.*
- *To spark a social movement of literacy activists who promote a culture of reading across South Africa.*
- *To supply and connect people in South Africa with a range of affordable, high-quality, exciting reading material for children in all South African languages (Nal’ibali, n.d.b: 1).*

The campaign is informed by research evidence that reading helps in developing vocabulary, grammar, writing style and spelling competence and that continued reading results in attainment of



pleasure. Further, children who read for enjoyment perform better at school in all subjects including maths, and reading is a greater predictor of a child's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. Nal'ibali's intention is thus to provide "access to engaging reading materials to build a nation where all children have the opportunity to realise their potential" (Nal'ibali, n.d.a: 1).

Nal'ibali's theory of change (ToC) is built around four domains of change:

1. **Knowledge and awareness**, aims to build adults' understanding of the value of reading for enjoyment and the link between the ability to read and schooling and academic success. Through multiple platforms, including radio, television, story power activations, competitions, campaign events and research, Nal'ibali spreads the message about making reading a part of everyday life.
2. **Opportunities to read** are promoted by Nal'ibali through supporting the establishment of RCs in homes, schools and community centres, as well as encouraging teachers to use the "Drop Everything and Read" (DEAR) period at school to make reading enjoyable for children.
3. **Role models** are trained by Nal'ibali to spread the message about the positive effects of reading, to read to children in their communities and to start their own reading clubs. Nal'ibali offers face to face and online training.
4. **Access to reading materials** is a key enabler of RFE, and Nal'ibali aims to increase access to reading materials, especially in African languages. To this end, Nal'ibali distributes the bilingual supplement and, as far as possible, books to RCs, and provides stories and other reading resources on their website.

In the long term, Nal'ibali would like to see dedication of resources by various stakeholders to grow and sustain a reading culture. The Nal'ibali ToC is depicted in Figure 1, including its 5-year targets for 2020-2024.





Figure 1: Nal'ibali Theory of Change

Source: Nal'ibali, 2019



2 About the Nal'ibali network reading clubs

2.1 What are reading clubs?

RCs are a core part of the Nal'ibali RFE campaign. According to Nal'ibali, a RC is a space where children and adults can participate in reading for enjoyment practices. People who love books and stories can regularly meet there to read, tell stories and discuss books. RCs are non-discriminatory and inclusive spaces where a sense of community is encouraged. Anyone can be involved in RCs, from toddlers to the elderly. Some RCs are part of regular programmes held for children at schools, crèches, religious institutions, after-school programmes or libraries (Nal'ibali, n.d.c).

When Nal'ibali was established in 2012, it launched training and mentoring to support partner organisations to create networks of RCs in libraries, crèches, schools and communities. In 2016 Nal'ibali became an independent organisation separate from PRAESA and launched the FUNda Leader Network (JET, 2018). FUNda Leaders (FLs) are reading role models who care about children's literacy and want to promote reading for enjoyment in their communities. FLs can support children's reading in a variety of ways including starting their own RC, starting a parent and tots group with other caregivers, sharing stories at a clinic, reading to children regularly, supplying snacks at a RC, helping with transport to and from the RC, donating books, and helping with organising books for a RC, school library or classroom (Nal'ibali, n.d.c).

RCs meet before school, during school, after school and/or over the weekend. Some RCs also run holiday programmes.

2.2 Reading club theory of change

The RC ToC, developed by Nal'ibali as part of this evaluation, is informed by the four change dimensions identified in the Nal'ibali ToC (see Figure 1).



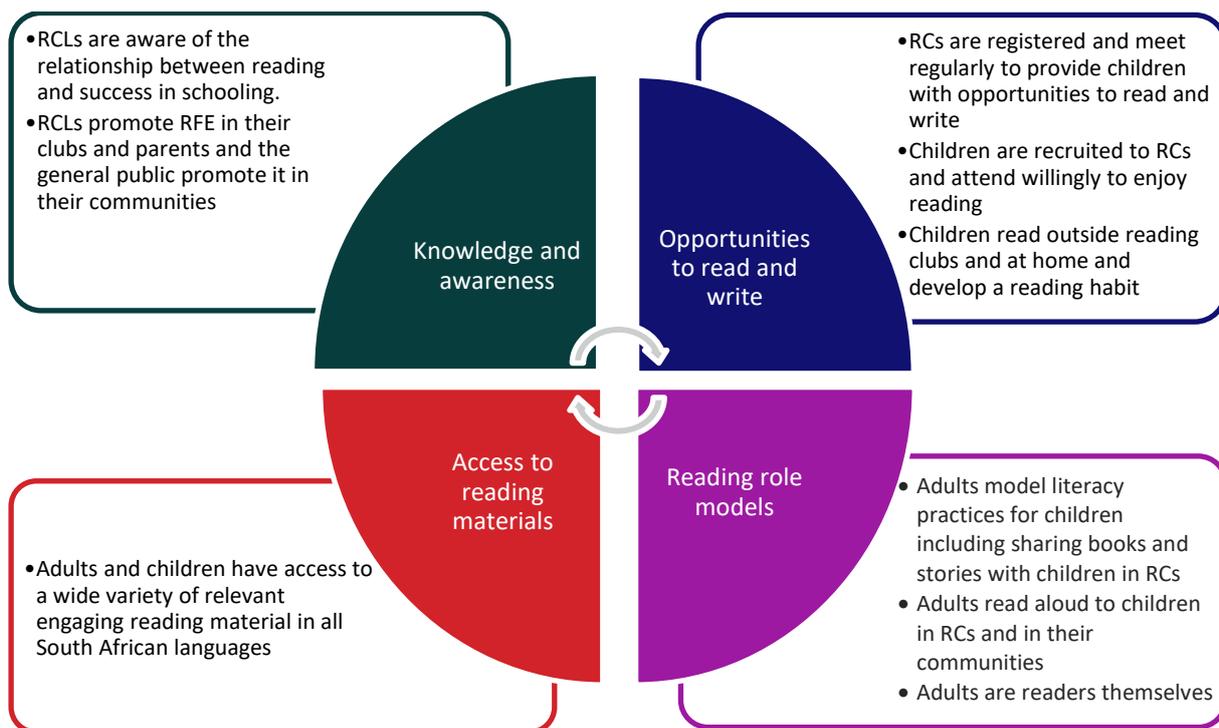


Figure 2: Nal'ibali RC domains of change

(Note: Adapted from supplied document on Nal'ibali RC ToC)

The ToC for RCs (n.d.d) is:

IF adults who love reading and working with children are trained and they register RCs, recruit children and meet in a safe and nurturing environment at least once a week, where the reading club leader (RCL) reads aloud to children, provides opportunities for children to handle text and take books home to read, play games and sing, and guides children in talking and writing about books that have been read, using the children's home languages and multilingual reading resources, **THEN** children will become lifelong readers with increased confidence in reading, writing and speaking in their mother tongue and in English, and reading for enjoyment will become part of everyday life. Because they are readers, children will enjoy engaging with any text, and be more equipped and confident to engage with schoolbooks, which is likely to increase their chances of success in school.

2.3 Current RC landscape

Going into the evaluation, Nal'ibali already knew quite a lot about its RC network, based on routine monitoring data that it analyses twice a year. Based on the latest monitoring data analysed mid-year in 2019 (Nal'ibali, 2019), Nal'ibali already knew and wanted the evaluation to confirm the following:

- Membership: Adults signed up children in 71% of the RCs, either through involving a whole class as a RC, a parental decision that children must join a RC or teachers deciding which children should join RCs.
- More girls were participating in RCs than boys, 50% versus 44%,



- In 2019, the average RC size was 32 children, and 52% of the RCs met the ideal adult:child ratio of 1:15 or fewer children per adult. Achievement of the optimal adult:child ratio varied by venue, and RCs in schools mostly failed to meet the ideal, with a ratio of 1:18, because they struggle to get volunteers – only 47% of the clubs reported they had volunteers. Preschools and ECD centres met the ideal as their ratios were 1:15.
- **Dosage:** Ideally, RCs should meet at least once a week. The monitoring data indicated that in June 2019, 89% of the RCs were meeting at least once to five times or more a week.
- **Access to reading resources:** In June 2019:
 - 51% of returning RCs, i.e. those that had registered prior to 2019 that were still running in 2019, reported that they had access to the Nal’ibali supplement.
 - 77% of returning RCs reported they had access to their own books, while 23% indicated they had none. Book quantities were, however, limited: 24% RCs had less than 11 books, and only 26% had more than 30.
 - 65% of the RCs were using library books and 43% were using Nal’ibali online materials.
 - 25% of RCs had supplements, library books and their own books.
 - 20% had library books and their own books.
 - 46% of the RCs had reading materials in isiZulu and 35% in isiXhosa. Material in the other South African languages was limited – less than 6% of the clubs had reading materials in Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi and Xitsonga.
- **Reading club sustainability:** Half to two thirds of RCs became inactive a year after registration and continued to decline afterwards:
 - 52% of RCs stopped running because the RCL left or moved away or no longer had time.
 - 13% stopped running because of a shortage of reading material, lack of support from Nal’ibali and organisational support.
 - 11% became inactive because of challenges with the venue, transport and a lack of volunteers.

In the findings section below, where relevant, evaluation findings are compared with existing monitoring data to identify the degree of alignment or divergence.”

Nal’ibali did not know and wanted to learn more about:

- The practices in RCs - How often key reading for enjoyment practices are taking place in RCs, such as adults reading aloud to children, discussing stories critically, children handling text and children taking books home?
- How involved volunteers and parents are at reading clubs, and what the nature of this involvement is?
- What the quality of practice at reading clubs is.
- What the reported outcomes of RCs are.



- How much it would cost to implement strategies for strengthening and sustaining RCs.

2.4 Nal'ibali support to RCs

Besides developing and supplying supplements, which are core to Nal'ibali's support to RCs, Nal'ibali also provides training to community members, teachers, ECD practitioners and partner organisation staff to capacitate them with knowledge and skills about how to run a RC. Training can lead to establishment and registration of RCs. From 2012 to date, Nal'ibali has trained over 28 000 people, 5 828 of them between January and June 2019. Of the people trained in 2019 (up to end June 2019), 97% attended face to face training and 3% did online training which was launched in 2019 and had been running for less than three months when the data for the Nal'ibali monitoring report was collected and analysed.

Although online training can provide just in time self-paced learning for those who cannot access face to face training and also provide a refresher for those who may want to check on forgotten concepts and practice, according to Nal'ibali, early indications are that throughput is low. Of 426 people who started the online training, 171 (40%) completed module 1, and 27 (6%) completed module 3 (Nal'ibali, 2019). However, this evaluation of throughput may be misguided since the face to face modules are completed in 2,5 days and could be failing to acknowledge the self-paced nature of online learning. Further, without data on why people are resorting to online training, whether it is for first time training or to refresh what they learned in a previous face to face training, judgement about throughput may be misleading. Close monitoring over time will enable a better assessment of the throughput and other trends for online training to inform how the modules should be offered, whether sequentially or whether people can choose which modules they want to engage with if it is for refresher training.

Mentoring, which is an integral support feature of the core campaign project, is done by Nal'ibali literacy mentors (LMs), who sign up clubs and provide mentoring to these clubs. As a campaign, Nal'ibali is set up to register RCs at scale to generate population wide effects which do not require constant maintenance from the Nal'ibali staff. This model can create tension between design of the programme and attainment of outcomes as RCs that require more focused support would close if they do not get visits from Nal'ibali.

Nal'ibali also provides varied remote support to RCs. There is an outbound call centre which also accepts inbound calls, and email and SMS lists push regular messaging to the network. Nal'ibali has offered email and SMS support for several years but in 2019 switched from an 'opt-in' to an 'opt-out' system, thus the number of people receiving messages increased significantly between 2018 and 2019. Nal'ibali sends all FLs and RCLs a monthly newsletter via email and regular SMS messages to inform them of events and other literacy-related celebrations. Nal'ibali also promotes its reading materials via social media, for example, when the latest supplement stories are uploaded to the website.



For the purposes of this evaluation, Nal’ibali grouped RCs into three groups, based on how they were recruited to the Nal’ibali network and the degree and type of support they should have received.

1. **Core campaign RCs** were established through Nal’ibali’s standard partnership approach which includes partner recruitment, training, and support and mentoring to establish RCs. These RCs generally do not receive frequent or regular visits from Nal’ibali staff. Some receive supplements, but not all, and very few receive books from Nal’ibali.¹⁵
2. **Special projects RCs** were established through Nal’ibali projects with dedicated staff and funding. In addition to training and mentoring, school and ECD sites receive weekly visits from Nal’ibali Story Sparkers (SSs), supplements and hanging libraries with books.¹⁶
3. **Online registration RCs** registered by using a form on Nal’ibali’s website or through interaction with Nal’ibali’s contact centre. These RCs generally have not received any training, are not affiliated with any of Nal’ibali’s partners and are less likely to receive reading materials from Nal’ibali.

3 Methodology

3.1 Approach

The evaluation approach for the Nal’ibali RC evaluation was **formative, learning oriented and utilisation focused**, premised on the principle that “evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use” (Patton, 2013) as the evaluation is intended to inform planning and budgeting for 2020 to support the implementation of effective and long running reading clubs. The evaluation was also theory focused and framed within sociocultural approaches to literacy development, which is a key aspect of the Nal’ibali campaign. An empirical and theoretical review of literacy development and RCs locally, regionally and internationally provided a context to understand what the theoretical underpinnings of RCs are, what their contribution to literacy is and what outcomes are associated with RCs.

Patton (1997) argues that “utilisation focused evaluation is inherently participatory and collaborative in actively involving primary intended users in all aspects of the evaluation” (1997: 100), and this increases the use of findings. The Nal’ibali research team collaborated with JET throughout the evaluation so that JET’s experience in evaluation was enhanced by Nal’ibali’s participation. This collaboration achieved the purpose of grounding data in the practitioner’s perspective (Patton, 1997: 101).

¹⁵ Core campaign RCs included all clubs established by the mainstream campaign, as well as clubs established via the specially-funded Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA), HCI Foundation and Diaconia projects. Although these projects had dedicated funding, they were implemented using the same rollout model as the core campaign during the time leading up to the evaluation.

¹⁶ Special projects RCs included the Story Powered Schools project in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which ran from 2017 to 2019, and the Lesedi and Letsatsi project in the Northern Cape and Free State, which ran in 2018 and 2019.



3.2 Evaluation questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following central question:

What are the most effective and cost-effective things Nal'ibali can do to support quality and sustainability of reading clubs?

To answer this question, primary and secondary questions were mapped in line with seven evaluation criteria that provided a conceptual frame to ensure that the evaluation questions addressed all components of RCs. Table 2 maps the evaluation questions against the evaluation criteria:

Table 2: Evaluation criteria and questions

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Report Section
Establishment	<p>What are the factors that lead to the formation of reading clubs and their membership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are reading clubs created? • What is the membership of reading clubs? • What does it mean to be a member of a reading club? • What types of Nal'ibali engagements are most effective at supporting reading club formation and ongoing activities? 	4.1
Access	<p>To what extent are reading clubs improving access to reading materials for children and adults participating in the reading clubs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of resources and reading materials are available? • Where is the material sourced? • Is the material available sufficient for the number of children in the reading club? • How often is material refreshed? 	4.2
Practice	<p>What are the factors that motivate children's and adults' participation in reading clubs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do reading clubs look like? • What is happening at reading clubs? • Who is involved in reading clubs? • How do adults in reading clubs scaffold children's literacy development and learning? • What resources are committed (by individuals, club leaders, organisations) towards participation in the clubs? • How do reading clubs track and measure engagement and progress? • What does engagement with Nal'ibali look like for established reading clubs? • To what degree are practices taking place aligned to those that are promulgated at Nal'ibali training sessions and in Nal'ibali resources? 	4.3



Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions	Report Section
Quality	<p>What are the characteristics, conditions and practices that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree are the conditions at reading clubs aligned to those that are promulgated at Nal’ibali training sessions and in Nal’ibali resources? What are the characteristics and conditions that support or inhibit reading club quality? 	4.4
Sustainability	<p>What are the factors, characteristics, conditions and practices that support or inhibit reading club longevity and sustainability?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what degree are reading clubs continuing (remaining active) over time? How long does it take from the time of registration for reading clubs to become inactive? What factors contribute to inactive reading clubs? What are the critical success factors for sustainable reading clubs? What can be done to keep reading clubs active? What can be done to revive inactive reading clubs? 	4.5
Effectiveness	<p>How, if at all, are reading clubs influencing literacy habits, motivation to read and self-efficacy and confidence of children and adults participating in the reading clubs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What relationships can we observe between dosage, quality, sustainability and outcomes? What relationships can be observed between the characteristics and conditions that support or inhibit quality and sustainability? What outcomes are taking place for children and adults in long-running reading clubs? 	4.6
Cost effectiveness	<p>What are the most effective and cost-effective things Nal’ibali can do to support quality and sustainability of reading clubs?</p>	5

A cross cutting question was: **How well does the reality on the ground align with information in Nal’ibali’s reading club database?** This question entailed comparing trends emerging from the evaluation to the monitoring data that Nal’ibali has in order to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the Nal’ibali data.

3.3 Design and methods

The evaluation adopted a **sequential explanatory mixed method** (quantitative and qualitative) design, employing telephone surveys, site visits and telephonic qualitative interviews to collect data. A mixed method design was useful as some methods of data collection were more suitable than others for the type of data that needed to be collected. For example, a telephonic survey was the most appropriate method to reach a fairly large sample of active RCLS as well 50 inactive RCLS in a short space of time. The survey was designed to collect data on the establishment of RCs, their access to resources, their practices and their effectiveness and sustainability, and to probe the



differences between active and inactive RCs as well as the reasons for RCs becoming inactive and whether there was any interest in reviving those that had closed.

The qualitative methodology comprised site visits to 25 purposively selected RCs, where several research tasks were completed at each RC. These included observation of a complete RC session, interviews with the RCL, a focus group discussion with parents or volunteers, and a focus group discussion with a small group of children who were members of the RC. Ten purposively selected inactive RCLs were also interviewed telephonically to get more in-depth information about practice when the RCs were still active and the reasons for their closure. Cost analysis was undertaken to determine the cost of implementing strategies to improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of RCs.

A clarification phase was included at the beginning of the evaluation to enable an in-depth understanding of RCs to better inform the study. This phase included a document review, six key informant interviews (KIIs) with key five Nal'ibali staff as well as a Nal'ibali staff member who used to be a master trainer, a scoping site visit to a RC in Dobsonville as well as three RCs in Cape Town, and an exploratory content review of the Nal'ibali online training that was launched in 2019 to understand what is promoted in Nal'ibali training. Two face to face and four telephonic interviews were conducted with Nal'ibali to clarify aspects of the project, and this informed the refinement of the design and development of evaluation instruments.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 Key informant interviews

Nal'ibali identified six key informants comprising two literacy mentors (LMs) based in the Western Cape (WC) and Kwazulu-Natal (KZN); a provincial support coordinator based in Gauteng (GT), a master trainer, based in KZN, a former employee who used to be a master trainer based in the WC, and a multilingual content specialist also based in the WC.

3.4.2 Exploratory site visits

The opportunistic visit to a RC in Dobsonville, Gauteng, as part of a deep dive site visit programme for Nal'ibali, provided an opportunity to visit a RC run at a crèche. Three other RCs in the WC were purposively selected for exploratory site visits. These included RCs run by a Nal'ibali LM, a volunteer and a Nal'ibali partner. The four types of RCs, which meet at different sites (a crèche, a church and a school) at different times (during school, after school and on a Saturday) provided diverse enough contexts about how RCs are run to inform the development of robust data gathering instruments for RC site visits.



3.4.3 Survey

The sampling methodology was finalised after the actual number of RCLs was known. JET received seven versions of the database from Na'ibali¹⁷ and used the latest version for sampling. A simple random sample design was employed to draw two samples—one for active and one for inactive RCs. R statistical package Version 3.3.2 was used to prepare the sampling frame data and to draw the sample to be used for piloting the survey instrument.

The data provided to JET contained a total of 9 248 records. To prepare the sampling frame, variable names and data were standardised, the data structure was checked and duplicate records were dropped. As the survey was to be conducted telephonically, it was essential to have contact details for the RCLs. The unit of analysis for this study was the RCL, and because many RCLs have multiple clubs, JET deduplicated the list of RCs to ensure that unique RCLs were selected for the survey. In the end, JET was left with 2 736 active RCs and 626 inactive RCs with contact details. From these, 30 active reading clubs and 20 inactive reading clubs were randomly selected for piloting purposes. Table 3 shows the sampling breakdown.

Table 3: Survey population, pilot sample and sampling frame

Reading Club	Survey population	Sample frame prior to pilot	Pilot sample	Sampling frame
Active	5 673	2 736	30	2 706
Inactive	674	626	20	606
Total	6 347	3 362	50	3 312

For a population of 2 706 active RCLs, a sample size of 1 029 ($3 \times 343 = 1 029$) with a lower margin of error of 2.406% was drawn. This allowed a representative sample which treats the RCLs as the unit of measurement for the quantitative survey.

Another sample for inactive RCLs was drawn to engage leaders that could be reached on evaluative issues of quality, longevity and effectiveness, based on the leaders' reflections of their club when it was still active. For a population of 606 inactive RCLs, a sample size of 150 ($3 \times 50 = 150$) was randomly selected for the quantitative survey. This sample was not representative, and results are not generalisable. Table 4 shows the sample frame and samples for active and inactive RCs.

Table 4: Sample size for a proportion per reading club for a 95% confidence level

Reading Clubs	Sample Frame (N)	Sample (n)	Survey
Active	2 706	1 029	349
Inactive	606	150	50

¹⁷ The reading club re-registration drive was underway during the sampling phase, and as such the database of active and inactive clubs was being updated regularly. Collaboration between JET and Na'ibali also enabled significant and valuable data cleaning.



3.4.4 Site visits

The selection of RCs for site visits was informed by data from the survey. The intention was to have a diversity of RCs reflecting the various types in order to evaluate whether there were differences in practice, quality and outcomes among these. Criteria for selecting reading clubs were longevity, inclusion of a mix of long running clubs and new clubs, project type, size of club, whether there were volunteers at the club, frequency and duration of meetings, location (urban, rural, semi-rural), venue and resources. Twenty-five sites were selected and they are presented in Table 5 by venue and project.

Table 5: Overview of site visit RCs by project and venue

Project	Core Campaign	Special projects	Online registration
No. of clubs run in a home	5	-	1
No. of clubs run in a school	3	5	1
No. of clubs run in community library	1	-	1
No. of clubs run at a crèche	6	-	
No. of clubs run at a community centre	1	-	
No. of clubs with no venue	1 ¹⁸	-	-
Total	17	5	3

Eighty percent of the clubs were established in 2018 and 2019, 10 clubs in each year. Two clubs were established in 2014, and one club each was established in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The provincial distribution of site visits to RCs is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Provincial distribution of RCs visited

Province	No. of RCs visited
EC	4
FS	2
GT	4
KZN	3
LP	3
MP	2
NC	2
NW	1
WC	4
Total	25

The EC, GT and WC had the highest number of RCs visited (4 each). The North West (NW) had only one club visited, and it was the only club that had been surveyed from that province.

¹⁸ This club was in transition and looking for a new venue as it had been displaced from its normal venue at a community centre where the other tenants were complaining about noise levels from the children.



3.4.5 Telephonic interviews

Twenty people who used to be leaders of RCs now inactive were purposively selected for telephonic interviews, with the aim of achieving 10 completed interviews. The selection was informed by the survey data and intended to include leaders of clubs that had been established in different years in different projects and provinces. Four of the RCLs used to run Story Powered Schools (SPS) RCs, one had been an online registration RC, and the rest (five) were core campaign clubs. Table 7 provides an overview of inactive RCs where successful qualitative interviews were conducted.

Table 7: Inactive RC sample overview

Reading club	Project	Province	Year Established
IRC1	Core campaign	GT	2018
IRC2	SPS	EC	2018
IRC3	SPS	KZN	2018
IRC4	Core campaign	NW	2015
IRC5	Core campaign	LP	2018
IRC6	Core campaign	FS	2019
IRC7	Core campaign	KZN	2018
IRC8	SPS	EC	2018
IRC9	Online registration	LP	2018
IRC10	SPS	KZN	2018

The clubs of three of the RCLs were based in KZN, two in the EC and Limpopo (LP) respectively and one each in the Free State (FS), NW and GT. Most of the clubs (eight) were established in 2018, and one each was established in 2015 and 2019¹⁹ respectively.

3.5 Instrument development, translation and piloting

3.5.1 Key informant interviews

The document review guided the development of the interview instrument with key informants. Two semi structured interview guides, informed by the evaluation criteria, were developed for the KIIs. The tools were similar in that they probed aspects about quality of RCs, practice in RCs, outcomes and longevity, but they were slightly different in that the instrument for the multilingual content specialist focused more on the provision of materials, while the one for the master trainer, provincial support coordinator and LM focused more on the establishment and running of RCs and practice. Both instruments probed the notion of quality of RCs, outcomes and sustainability. The instruments were both in English. The KIIs deepened JET's understanding of the conceptualisation, implementation and intended outcomes of RCs and assisted in the development of instruments for the survey and the qualitative tools.

¹⁹ The survey revealed that this club had shut down



3.5.2 Exploratory site visits

A structured observation guide was developed for the exploratory visits to three selected RCs. The guide required the recording of the following information during an observed RC session: activities that took place; length of each activity; number of children in the session; languages used; number of adults in the session and what they were doing; seating arrangements; and type of engagement between RCL and children. A section on observations relating to the RC environment was included: where the RC took place; types and quantities of resources and whether they were age appropriate; and whether the environment was print rich, with a varied display of children's work and/or posters on the walls. Finally, there were a few questions for a post observation interview (POI) with the RCL to probe whether the RC session had gone according to plan and whether the RCL would change anything if they were to do it all over again. The guide was, in a way, piloting the observation instrument that would be used for the 25 site visits.

3.5.3 Survey

Two survey instruments were developed with input from Nal'ibali, one for active RCLs and another for RCLs who used to run clubs that were no longer active. The instruments contained questions for each evaluation criterion and the questions were similar for active and inactive RCs to enable comparisons between them. The survey instruments were translated into four languages: Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho, based on a decision reached between JET and Nal'ibali that translations would be done only for languages that were spoken by 3% or more of potential respondents, according to the database information on the RCLs' preferred languages of communication.

Noteworthy is that South African Sign Language (SASL) was added to the list of languages in the questions inquiring about the languages spoken and read by RCLs as well as the languages in which reading materials were available. This is because an exploration of the Nal'ibali website revealed SASL stories that were told on World Read Aloud Day by the Sign Language Education and Development (SLED) staff, alerting us to the possibility of SASL as a language for storytelling and the necessity of finding out if there were any RCs focusing on deaf/hearing impaired children.

Piloting the survey instrument

For both the pilot and the main surveys, data was collected using a computer assisted telephonic interview system (CATI) with the software Survey to Go. Topline Research Solutions (TRS) was responsible for the data collection. Prior to carrying out the pilot, the CATI system was developed and tested. The researchers working on the surveys then received training on the survey instruments.

The survey instrument was piloted prior to being finalised to ascertain whether it was practical and user-friendly, whether it was clear to respondents and how they interpreted the questions, and whether the instrument would generate useful information.



The pilot was conducted from 25 July 2019 to 27 July 2019. The data collected was checked using Stata 14.2, and the results were used to evaluate the quality of the responses and uncover any inconsistencies in the data. The pilot also demonstrated the length of time taken to administer the instrument and all possible logistics involved in its administration. Based on the results of the pilot testing, final adjustments to the instrument were made as necessary.

3.5.4 Qualitative instruments

Seven qualitative instruments were developed: three interview guides for RCLs from inactive clubs and active clubs, and one for the Ss. Three focus group tools were developed for children, volunteers and parents, and an observation guide was developed for RC session observations. The qualitative instruments were not translated, the strategy being that at least one of the pair of researchers conducting a RC site visit would have language capabilities to match the languages used in the RC, based on survey data.

Piloting the qualitative instruments

Qualitative instruments were piloted at a school-based RC in GT. Questions that appeared to have been misunderstood or which the respondents found hard to answer were reviewed and adjusted. In a way, the SPS site visits conducted in August provided an opportunity to further 'pilot' the instruments. The instruments were adjusted further after these visits to remove vagueness and enhance clarity. The interview instrument for inactive RCLs was piloted telephonically with two inactive RCLs in the WC, thereby enabling a test of the method, the questions and the length of the instrument.

3.6 Data collection

3.6.1 Survey

Data collection for the main survey began on 29 July 2019 and ended on 26 August 2019. All the interviews were conducted telephonically. Each interview took on average 30 minutes to complete. Interviews were conducted in Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, isiZulu or Sesotho by a team of multilingual interviewers who had been assigned interviewees based on their language competencies.

Interviewers were initially supervised by a TRS supervisor while conducting an interview, and immediately after completing the interview they were corrected to prevent repetition of any mistakes that had been made. All potential participants were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. Potential participants were then asked if they were willing to voluntarily complete the survey. For those who responded positively, the survey was then carried out. For those who indicated that they did not wish to participate, the person was thanked and the call ended. This was the case with only two active and four inactive RCLs who indicated they did not have time for the interview.



Call backs were conducted for 25% of each interviewer’s interviews: respondents were called to confirm whether they had been interviewed and a few questions from the questionnaires were used as quality check (QC) questions, for example, Q85. “*Would you be interested in being considered for a site visit if your reading club meets the criteria for site visits?*”

JET received interim survey data on a regular basis from TRS while the survey was in progress. Quality assurance of the data was conducted by the JET team and entailed checking the data sets received for consistency: no inconsistencies were found.

Of the 1 029 active reading clubs that made up the sample, a total of 349 complete responses were received, giving a response rate of 33.9%, which is higher than the current benchmark of 18% for telephone surveys. Generally, the response rate for telephone surveys has been plunging over the years, and the benchmark is now 18% compared to 57% for face to face surveys (Lindemann, 2019). Of the sample of 150 inactive reading clubs, 50 complete responses were received, giving a response rate of 33.3%. The survey response rates are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Response rates

Reading Clubs	Sample (n)	Survey	Response rate
Active	1 029	349	33.9%
Inactive	150	50	33.3%

3.6.2 Site visits

A week before the site visits began, the research team that would be collecting data underwent two half days of training using a training manual developed for this purpose. The first day dealt with the methodology, while the second dealt with data capture and analysis. The intention was for two researchers to visit each site: thus six researchers were trained, as well as the data quality assurer who would be checking the data submitted.

At each RC, except at SPS RCs, there were four research activities:

1. RC leader interview;
2. RC session observation, with a short post observation interview with the RCL;
3. Child focus group (CFG) discussion with about 10 children;
4. Parent focus group (PFG) discussion with four or more parents or volunteer focus group discussion with four or more volunteers.

At two SPS RCs there were also interviews with Ss. One had supported the school the previous year and had her own RCs that she was still running. Another had joined Nal’ibali in early 2019.

No child focus groups were conducted at ECD sites because it was agreed that a FG discussion was not the best method to engage with children of this age group. Table 9 provides an overview of data collected at RCs during site visits.



Table 9: Overview of data collected at site visits

Research activity	No. conducted	Total number of respondents engaged
RCL interviews	25	32 ²⁰
SS interviews	2	2
Child focus group discussion	20	241
Volunteer focus group discussion	18	56
Parent focus group discussion	5	22
Observations	22	507 ²¹

Interviews and focus group discussions and RC sessions observed were audio recorded and detailed notes were taken on site.

We estimated that completing all research activities at a site would require up to four hours and this would present challenges at clubs that meet after school as children and the RCL and volunteers would be kept at a site well beyond their normal operational times. We also considered the safety implications of this. The deployment of two researchers at each site enabled the splitting of the research activities between the two and also ensured that there was at least one researcher who could communicate with the respondents, especially the children, in their home language. Even for clubs that meet during school time, having two researchers concurrently collecting data from different respondents ensured minimal disruption of the day at the site. Having two researchers at a site also increased rigour as the researchers would confer if there were any difficulties or anomalies at the site and they would also be able to discuss what they had observed before writing up and analysing their data.

3.6.3 Qualitative telephonic interviews

Telephonic interviews with 10 inactive RC leaders lasted between 30-45 minutes each, and they were audio recorded, with notes written from the audio recordings afterwards.

3.6.4 Ethical considerations

Research team members engaging with respondents throughout all research activities explained the purpose of the evaluation and research activity and assured respondents of their anonymity. Consent forms were provided and signed before each research activity. Adults acted *in loco parentis*, and children signed consent forms. Respondents were informed that they could participate only if they wished to do so and could withdraw from participation at any point during the research activity. Engagement with children adhered to the prescripts of the Nal'ibali Child Protection Policy (Nal'ibali, n.d.e). Survey respondents were interviewed in their preferred language, and for site visits,

²⁰ At five RCs, a couple of RCLs asked to be interviewed collectively in pairs or threes as they work collaboratively at the sites, which included a library, homes, and a crèche.

²¹ 507 children participated in the observed RC sessions but only 241 were engaged in focus group discussions.



researchers were assigned clubs that used languages that researchers could speak so that engagement was in the home language of the respondent, if needed.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Survey

Over the period 3 October 2019 to 11 October 2019, JET worked on verifying, validating, cleaning and analysing the data. These processes were often inter-linked, such that one necessitated the other and vice versa. The processes involved checking variable labels, correcting implausible variable values, checking for missing data and duplicates as well as deriving new variables. Stata version 14.2 was used to process and analyse the data and conduct descriptive analysis which included measures such as means, proportions and frequencies. Standard errors which give measures of precision for estimates were provided for all estimates.

3.7.2 RC quality analysis

A key evaluation question was: **What are the characteristics, conditions, and practices that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs?** To answer this question, a quality framework was developed by JET and Nal'ibali to reflect the characteristics, conditions and practices conducive to quality in RCs. Four focus areas to determine quality were identified: membership, dosage, access to resources, and practice, each with specific dimensions to be used as measures of quality. For each area, a weighting between 2 and 6 was assigned, and dimensions and indicators for minimum thresholds were determined and assigned. Table 10 presents an overview of the quality framework used.

Table 10: Quality framework for RCs

Focus area	Dimensions	Indicators: Minimum Threshold	Weighting
Membership	Adult to child	Facilitator to child ratio is no greater than 1-15	2
Dosage	Frequency of club meeting	At least once a week	2
	Duration of club meeting	At least 45 minutes	
Access to Resources	Reading materials	Club has at least 2 of the core reading materials (own books, supplements, library books)	6
	Other literacy development materials	Club has at least one type of writing material (crayons, pens, kokis, pencils), and one type of paper (books to write in, writing and/or drawing paper).	



Focus area	Dimensions	Indicators: Minimum Threshold	Weighting
	Refreshment of non Nal'ibali resources	Club refreshes own books or library books at least twice a year	
Practice: Essential	Adults read aloud to children	Read aloud to children is mostly or always	3
	Children's independent engagement with text	Children read in pairs, read in small groups, or read quietly on their own mostly, or always	
	Use of children's home language/s	RCL uses children's home language for activities - Always/Mostly	
Practice: Supporting	Children's Interpretive actions	Children use their own writing or drawing mostly or always	2
	Nurturing curiosity and developing children's motivation to read	Children talk about books that have been read mostly or always	
	Taking materials home	Children are allowed to take books home	
	Planning for RC meetings	Any form of planning as listed	

Each dimension was scored 1 if it met the minimum threshold or 0 if it did not, then multiplied by the weighting for that focus area, for example, for dosage, if the RC met at least once a week and for less than 45 minutes each time, the analysis would be:

- **Score:** 1 for frequency of meetings + 0 for duration of meetings = 1
- **Scale** = Total score dosage (1) divided by the weighting for dosage (2): $(1/2) \times 2 = 0,5$

The scores for each dimension were added up to determine the quality scale, and a five-tier scale denoting different levels of quality was developed as reflected in Table 11.

Table 11: Reading club quality scale

Scale	Quality description
1-3	Weak
4-6	Struggling
7-9	Developing
10-12	Good
13-15	Excellent



3.7.3 Qualitative data

All qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis. Data coding was done during the data write ups by the researchers, then quality assured by a quality assurer who was part of the evaluation team, and then by the project lead. Any discrepancies in the coding were discussed among the three people involved in order to resolve them.

3.7.4 Cost analysis

The ingredients method (also known as the total resource cost method) was the approach utilised to conduct the basic cost assessment and feasibility analysis²² for determining how much it costs to implement interventions that support quality and sustainability. This approach considers all the resources (ingredients) necessary to provide services in calculating or estimating the costs of each resource/activity (Levin & McEwan, 2001). The analysis was informed by Na'ibali cost data and a review of cost documents as well as evaluation findings in relation to dimensions that differentiate quality. This approach has been widely touted by various researchers as a way to develop cost estimates that reflect the value of all resources required for delivering a service (Boulatoff & Jump, 2007; Corso & Filene, 2009; Holland & Levin, 2017; Levin & McEwan, 2001; Yates, 2009). This analytical approach offers prospects to assist Na'ibali decision makers, evaluators and stakeholders to develop estimates of the total cost of a typical Na'ibali reading club²³ and the cost of its key components or activities.

The basic cost assessment (i.e. the ingredient method) and feasibility analysis process undertaken for the purposes of this study involved the following steps:

- Identifying all the necessary resources required to run a typical Na'ibali reading club;
- Obtaining actual cost data for all the resources/ingredients identified. The data was obtained from the Na'ibali financial records for the year 2018/2019, review of Na'ibali data files and consultation with Na'ibali personnel. These costs were grouped into two broad categories: direct programme costs and indirect programme costs of the major/key activities for running a typical Na'ibali RC. This costing was aligned to the costing model/format utilised by Na'ibali. The two broad cost categories were further split into two sub-categories: personnel and non-personnel costs;
- Conducting an estimate of the total resource cost of running a typical Na'ibali RC;
- Conducting a cost composition analysis to illustrate how the total resource costs are apportioned amongst all the resource cost line items considered for the purposes of this evaluation;

²² Feasibility analysis refers to the process of confirming that a strategy/plan/initiative is possible and makes sense, which is informed by the affordability thereof based on the costed items.

²³ By "typical Na'ibali reading club" we mean a reading club that has been costed according to the generic inputs that go into a reading club as identified by Na'ibali. However, the costs then change, based on the kind of Na'ibali reading club (i.e. Online Registration, Core Campaign and Special Projects). So although the cost of a typical club is the average of all three, there may be variations among the three types of projects.



- Obtaining prospective interventions that NaI'ibali can adopt to support the quality and sustainability of RCs identified in the RC evaluation;
- Costing these prospective interventions that NaI'ibali can adopt to support the quality and sustainability of NaI'ibali reading clubs in order to determine how much it would cost per RC to implement these interventions.

3.7.5 Validity and reliability

Hammersley points out that validity is “the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers” (1990: 57), and reliability is the “degree of consistency with which instances are assigned the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions” (1990: 67). In this study, *descriptive validity*, that is, the full and accurate recording of data, was achieved for site visits through audio recordings of all the events at the sites. The detailed description of the methodology and the presentation of codes used for analysis as well as the presentation of a sample of analysis and data coding are meant to address reliability issues.

Interpretive validity, the ability of the research to make interpretations of data, was addressed through the development of the thematic codes used to interpret *all* data including that from interviews, focus groups and lesson observations. While interviews pose a validity and reliability risk, this risk was lowered as study respondents were talking about their own experiences of running and participating in RCS. Further, interviewing different groups of respondents enabled triangulation of data.

3.8 Limitations

3.8.1 Study design limitations

Since the scope of the study was entirely on the running of RCs at their sites, the respondents were all RCLs, volunteers, parents and children who are members of RCs. There was no opportunity to interrogate the design or organisational structure of RCs or the resources dedicated to RCs within the larger scope of the NaI'ibali campaign from the point of view of NaI'ibali staff since they were only engaged at the clarificatory phase. Thus it was also not possible to explain respondent data on support from NaI'ibali or to triangulate information on inputs supplied by NaI'ibali.

Further, there was scope for only one site visit per RC, and as a result, we could not verify if what was observed during the RC session was ‘typical’ practice. However, the risk of observing a ‘staged show’ was mitigated by communicating to the RCL during site visit set up that the evaluation team would be observing a RC session and conducting focus groups and interviews to learn from the RCLs about their practice. The term evaluation was used minimally in engagement with the RCLs to encourage ‘normal’ behaviour.

There were no opportunities during the clarificatory phase to observe a training session to see first-hand what is emphasised in the NaI'ibali training. As such, our understanding of the training is based



on an evaluation of the training manuals. However, we were able to go through the online training which also exposes preferred practice.

The interview and survey data is self-reported, and both forms of data are vulnerable to reporting bias, including social desirability bias, especially with evaluative type questions where RCLs are asked to rate outcomes for children. The evaluation may be clouded if teachers think positive evaluation of outcomes for children or themselves reflects well on them. The results must be interpreted with caution as the data could not be triangulated with other more objective data.

3.8.2 Survey limitations

For sampling, the sampling frame refers to the population of RCs that have phone numbers as RCs without phone numbers were excluded from the evaluation. So there is potential selection bias because only RCLs with a valid telephone number were contacted, and only those who answered their phones were asked to participate. Of the mobile numbers contacted from the active RCL sample, 41 did not answer, and 56 numbers went to voicemail; and for the inactive RC sample, 35 numbers were not answered, 26 went to voicemail, and 13 were incorrect numbers as the people who answered did not know who we were looking for. Telephone numbers that were not answered were tried up to six times before moving on to other numbers.

3.8.3 Site visit limitations

In the school-based RCs, only the RCLs were engaged during site visits, whereas the principal or school management team could also have shared perceptions about the RC. Further, there was no scope to triangulate information on outcomes. For example, when the RCL mentioned that attendance had improved, this could have been checked against the school's attendance registers and claims of improved outcomes against test and exam results; however, there was no scope for this in the evaluation. This should be considered for future evaluations, especially given that there is likely to be high social desirability bias when speaking about outcomes.

As indicated in **section 3.6.2**, the plan was to interview the RCL, observe a complete RC session, conduct an FGD with parents or volunteers, and conduct an FGD with the children at each site. Unfortunately, challenges were experienced with completing all activities at every RC visited. Regarding FGs with volunteers, at some RCs only one volunteer turned up, and at others, there was only one volunteer. In such cases, an interview was conducted with the one volunteer using the FGD instrument. There was a challenge getting parents to participate. In some instances, this was because, according to the RCL, parents are not interested in their children's education. This indicates that although the campaign wants parents to be involved in RCs, in some contexts this will never happen, and efforts should be turned to places where parents may actually want to be involved. In other RCs, the time of the site visit coincided with social grant payments, making parents unavailable. This shows how parental involvement has to be understood within the socioeconomic realities where RCs are taking place.



Children in crèche based RCs were not interviewed during site visits as it was agreed that it would be difficult to get credible data from them. The JET early childhood development (ECD) specialist advised that pre-schoolers tend to repeat what their peers have said so a focus group was likely to yield responses that did not reflect what the children felt but rather what their peers who were outspoken said. She advised that one on one interviews with age appropriate interviewing tools like picture cards would be more useful. This methodology was not possible with the available budget and so was not considered.

Three (12%) of the RCs that we had planned to visit became inactive between the time they had agreed to be visited and the time of the site visits, and this suggests a high level of turn over for RCs. Two (8%) of the RCLs found employment and could no longer run the RC, and the other RCL had been incapacitated because of renovations that had commenced at the venue at which the RC met, leading to the temporary suspension of the RC. This also suggests that it makes it difficult for Nal'ibali to know at any given time whether RCs are open after they have reregistered.

Other access challenges related to contextual factors at RC venues. At a RC in Mpumalanga (MP), which had been selected for the site visit because it was a small club in a rural area with five children and run from a home, it became very windy on the day scheduled for the visit, leading to a cancellation of the RC session as the meetings take place outside. At another site in GP, on the day of the visit, there was no water at the club which is run in a crèche. As a result, children were dismissed and only the interview with the RCL and focus group with the volunteers were completed, with the agreement that the RC session observation would warrant a return visit. All efforts to contact the RCL for the return observation visit were unsuccessful. Yet another club, which met at a community centre, had been asked to find another venue as other tenants with business operations at the centre had complained about the noise from the RC. As a result, the research team was only able to conduct the volunteer focus group (VFG) discussion and the RCL interview for this club. These examples highlight how RCs run in unpredictable environments which may make it difficult for them to meet their intended goals, for example, they may want to meet weekly but may subsequently fail to do so for the full calendar year because of circumstances beyond their control. This will affect the consistency of meetings, which would also affect the children.

4 Key findings and discussion

As highlighted in the methodology section, the scope of the evaluation was both active and inactive RCs. As far as necessary, this section presents key results for active and inactive RCs to establish whether there are differences in the establishment of RCs, access to resources, practices, quality, and effectiveness that may provide an understanding of why RCs become inactive. Since the sample for active RCs is 349, while that for inactive RCs is 50, the data for active RCs will be presented as a percentage, while that for inactive RCs will be presented as both integer and percentage as use of percentages for small samples can be misleading.

This section presents and discusses findings drawing on survey data and qualitative data from:



- 349 surveys with active RCLs;
- 50 surveys with inactive RCLs;
- 25 site visits where a RC session was observed and there were interviews with RCLs and Ss (at SPS only) and focus groups with children, parents and volunteers;
- 10 telephone interviews with inactive RCLs.

Where necessary, active RC data is compared to that of inactive RCs. The analysis by types of RCs is also presented where necessary to draw distinctions between special projects, core campaign and online registration RCs. Where applicable, the findings will be compared to Nal’ibali monitoring data to establish the veracity of this data.

4.1 Establishment of RCs

To understand the formation of RCs, the evaluation sought to answer the question: **What are the factors that lead to the formation of reading clubs and their membership?** We wanted to comprehend how RCs are established and by who, and what Nal’ibali’s role is in the formation of RCs. We also wanted to find out where RCs meet and what the membership of RCs is.

4.1.1 How are reading clubs created? What types of Nal’ibali engagements are most effective at supporting reading club formation and ongoing activities?

In both active and inactive RC surveys, respondents were asked how their RC had started²⁴, and their responses show that direct contact with Nal’ibali in a training session was the most catalytic in the formation of clubs. More than half (53%) of the active RCLs and 32 (64%) inactive RCLs indicated that they attended a Nal’ibali training session and were invited to sign up RCs. It also seems that where respondents were already working with children, it was easier to form a RC, as was the case with 29% of active and 7 (14%) inactive RCLs. Table 12 presents an overview of the frequency with which active and inactive RCLs cited the various factors that contributed to formation of their RC.

Table 12: How RCs started among active and inactive RCs

How reading club started	Proportion of active RCLs citing this factor (n=349)	Proportion of inactive RCLs citing this factor (n=50)
I went to a Nal’ibali training, and Nal’ibali asked/invited us to sign up reading clubs	184(53%)	32(64%)
I was already working with a group of children and I turned it into a reading club	102(29%)	7(14%)
My school/organisation asked me to start a reading club	37(11%)	4(8%)
I heard about Nal’ibali at an event and decided to start a reading club	24(7%)	2(4%)

²⁴ This was a multiple option response question



How reading club started	Proportion of active RCLs citing this factor (n=349)	Proportion of inactive RCLs citing this factor (n=50)
I was reading to my own children, and other children started joining us	18(5%)	1(2%)
A friend or family member encouraged me to start a reading club	11(3%)	1(2%)
I got reading resources from Nal'ibali to start a reading club	8(2%)	-

Of all the factors mentioned by active RCs, the least influential (2%) in the establishment of RCs was receiving reading materials from Nal'ibali to start a RC.

4.1.2 What do reading clubs look like?

Broadly, most RCs use the sites of educational organisations for their meetings:

- 49% use schools, and 18% use preschools/crèches, since most of the core campaign and special projects are run mainly in schools and crèches;
- 15% RCs meet in homes;
- 8% RCs meet in libraries²⁵;
- 4% meet in community centres; and
- 3% meet in churches.

Use of these venues varied by project type, as highlighted in Figure 3.

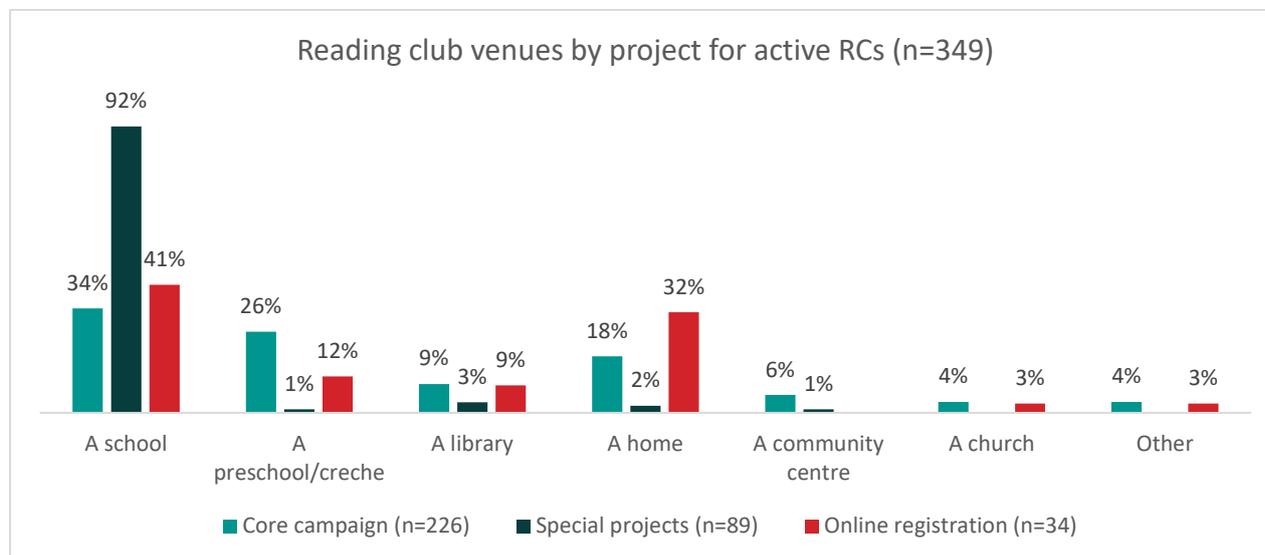


Figure 3: RC venues by type of project

²⁵ During site visit engagement, it emerged that the term 'library' is understood in different ways, to mean either a public library or a school library. It is therefore not possible for this research to know which of the RCs are meeting in a school or community library. The distinction between the two should be clarified in future research.



Among active clubs, special projects RCs utilise school venues the most, while online registration clubs utilise schools and homes more than special and core campaign clubs. The patterns are similar for inactive clubs, where schools were the most utilised venues by all clubs – 29(58%) inactive RCs utilised schools. The 3% of active RCLs who reported that they meet in ‘other’ venues cited a park, orphanages and an old age home. The RC meeting sites are stable, as 94% of RCLs indicated that they always meet at these venues.

There are multiple alternative venues used for pragmatic and augmenting reasons: when the normal venues are not available; when RCLs need different space to facilitate activities that do not work well in the normally used space, for example, dancing which requires bigger space; or when wanting to involve different children in the community by moving the venue from a crèche to, for example, the RCL’s home.

As much as RC venues are enablers for meetings to take place, the evaluation found that they can also be a constraint to participation and awareness. Some parents highlighted that financial circumstances constrained the community from partaking in RC activities, particularly those affiliated to a crèche or day care centre where parents must pay for their child to attend. Having a RC as part of a school curriculum or part of a day care or crèche programme also reduces the RC’s visibility. Some parents who were interviewed pointed out that they were not involved in the RC at all, since they were unaware of its existence until the evaluation focus group discussion took place. One parent clarified *“I wasn’t aware there was a RC. We just bring them [children] in the morning and then fetch them in the evenings”* (Parent Focus Group).

A comparison of Nal’ibali monitoring data and survey data regarding RC venues indicated slight variances (to be expected because we were surveying a sample and not the entire population, and because of the 4% of clubs where data for venues is missing in the database) for all venues, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Comparing Nal’ibali monitoring and survey data for active club meeting venues

Venue	Database	Survey	Variance
A school	1 221 (45%)	172 (49%)	-4%
A preschool/crèche	614 (23%)	64 (18%)	5%
A library	180 (7%)	27 (8%)	-1%
A home	327 (12%)	54 (15%)	-3%
A community centre	158 (6%)	14 (4%)	12%
A church	82 (3%)	9 (3%)	0%
Other	27 (1%)	9 (3%)	-2%
Missing	97 (4%)	-	-
Total	2 706 (100%)	349 (100%)	-

There is therefore some consistency between Nal’ibali data and evaluation data regarding the RC venues which suggests the data is credible.



4.1.3 What is the membership of RCs?

This sub-section draws on survey data to characterise RC membership. The extent to which RCs meet the quality threshold for membership, which is an ideal adult:child ratio of 1:15 or lower is also discussed.

RC core members consist of RCLs, volunteers and children.

Reading club leaders

A majority of RCLs are women and black African:

- 90% of RCLs in active clubs are women.
- 80% of the RCLs are between the ages of 30 and 59, and only 3% are younger than 20.
- 89% of RCLs are black African; 8% are coloured, 2% are white, and 1% are Indian.
- 27% of RCLs have a certificate and 55% had a post-secondary qualification, i.e. diploma, higher certificate, undergraduate degree and postgraduate degree as their highest qualification. This makes RCL generally more qualified than South African adults, as only 12% of South African adults had post-secondary qualifications in 2016 according to the community household survey (StatsSA, 2016).

That the majority of RCLs are black African is positive as inroads are being made in developing linguistically diverse cohorts of role models in communities that have not had opportunities to read for pleasure. None of the active RCLs surveyed indicated that they were proficient in SASL, suggesting that there is a targeting gap in the RFE campaign which provides an opportunity for focusing on a RFE campaign for deaf children to read and engage with text in their mother tongue.

Active RCs are mostly being run by fully employed individuals – 65% of active RCLs are in full time employment compared to 36% of inactive RCLs who were in full time employment. Given that 62% of the active RCLs are in special projects RCs, where 46% are also primary school teachers, this data suggests that full time employment in schools is a predictor of RC inactivity.

Figure 4 gives an overview of employment status of active RCLs by project and shows that online registration RCs have the highest proportion of unemployed RCLs who are work seekers.



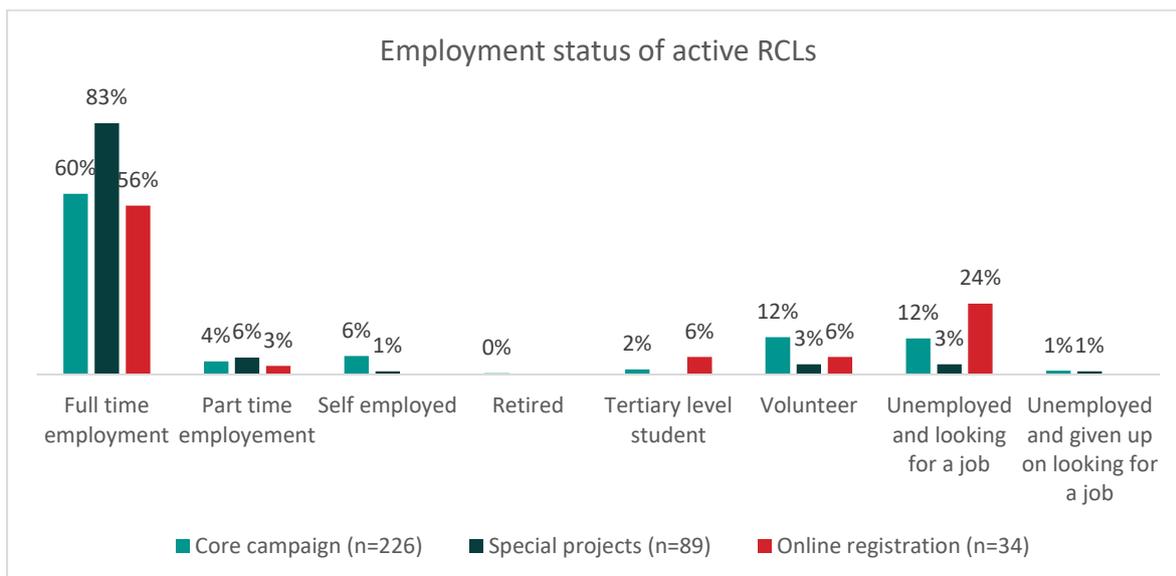


Figure 4: Employment status of active RCLs

From the full sample, 33% of the active RCLs are primary school teachers and 26% of inactive RCLs were primary school teachers. Figure 5 gives an overview of the identities of active RCLs.

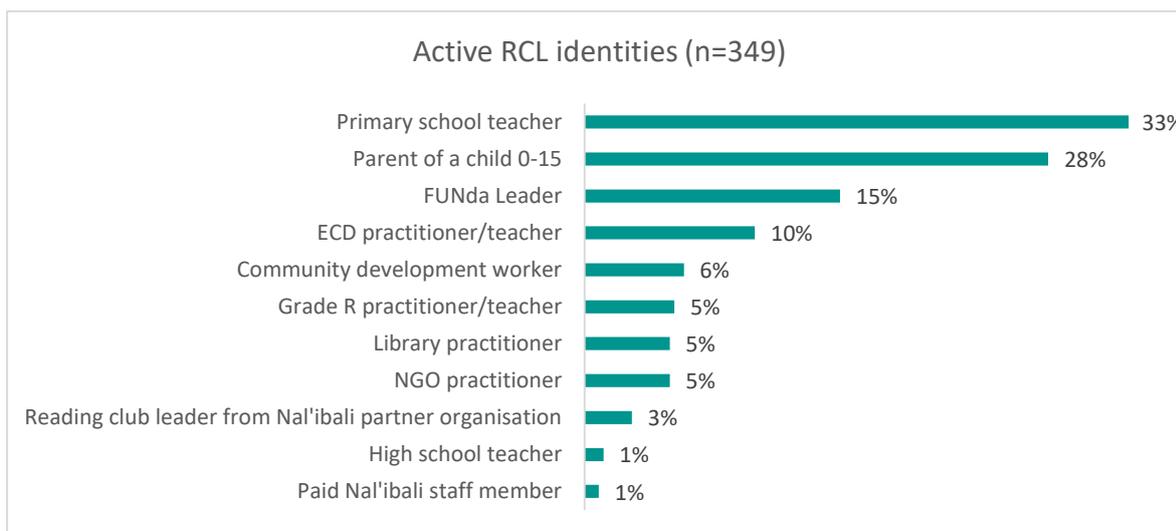


Figure 5: Active RCL identities

Identities of RCLs vary significantly by project, in line with how the RCs in each project are established, indicating that Nal'ibali's targeting is appropriate in terms of the children it wants to reach:

- 63% of active special projects RCLs compared to 22% core campaign and 26% online registration RCLs are primary school teachers as the majority of special projects clubs are in schools.
- 26% online registration and 19% core campaign RCLs are FUNda Leaders compared to 2% of special projects RCLs – these online and core campaign RCs were started by FUNda leaders.



- 12% of core campaign RCLs are ECD teachers/practitioners compared to 7% special projects and 6% online – core campaign projects are based on a partnership model, and ECD is a focus of the partnerships.

A common identity across the types of RCs, which also shows fidelity in Nal’ibali’s targeting, is that there are similar proportions of parents of children 0-15 in the main active sample: 30% for core campaign, 26% for special projects and 24% for online registration RCs. Unfortunately, the high proportion of parents with children 0-15 in inactive RCLs across the projects is also high, suggesting that there is high susceptibility for closure among these RCLs. However, even though there appear to be patterns emerging, the sample sizes are very small for inactive RCLs, and so the deductions should be treated with caution.

Volunteers

Volunteers can run their own clubs or they can assist other RCLs to run clubs. Adult volunteers are assisting equally with literacy development as well as literacy supporting activities. The core campaign RCs seem to be utilising volunteers to assist with various activities, particularly the management of activities during group work, to a greater extent than the RCs in other projects. The other ways that were mentioned where volunteers assist include helping with administration, for example, taking the attendance register, and doing other substantive tasks such as helping with homework done at clubs, motivating children, ensuring that children do not wander off during activities, particularly in big groups of younger children, and taking notes and photographs for the portfolio of evidence. The activities²⁶ that adult volunteers help with in active RCs and the prevalence of each type of activity are presented in Figures 6 and 7.

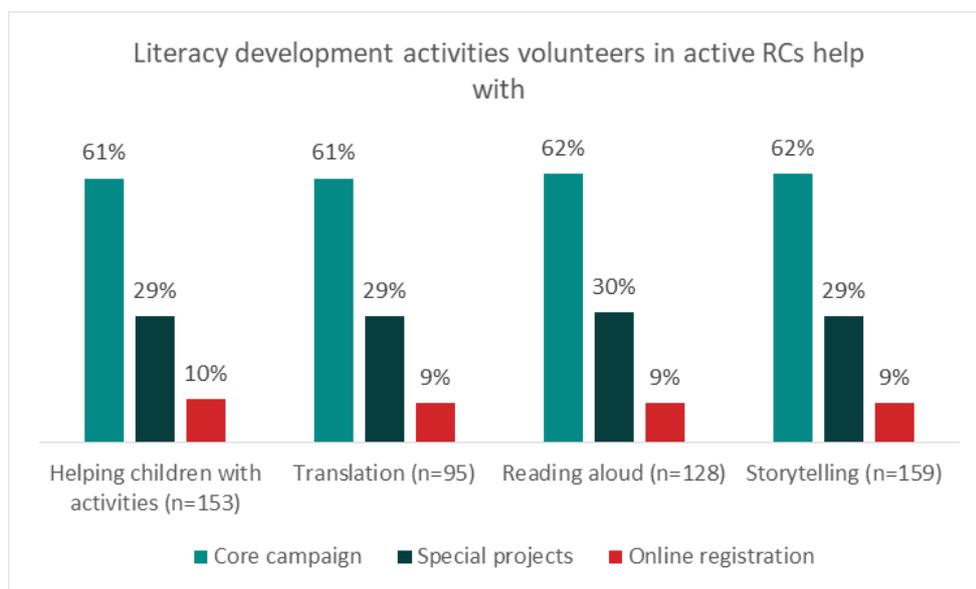


Figure 6: Literacy development activities RCLs assist with in active RCs

²⁶ The question about what volunteers help with was a multiple response options question.



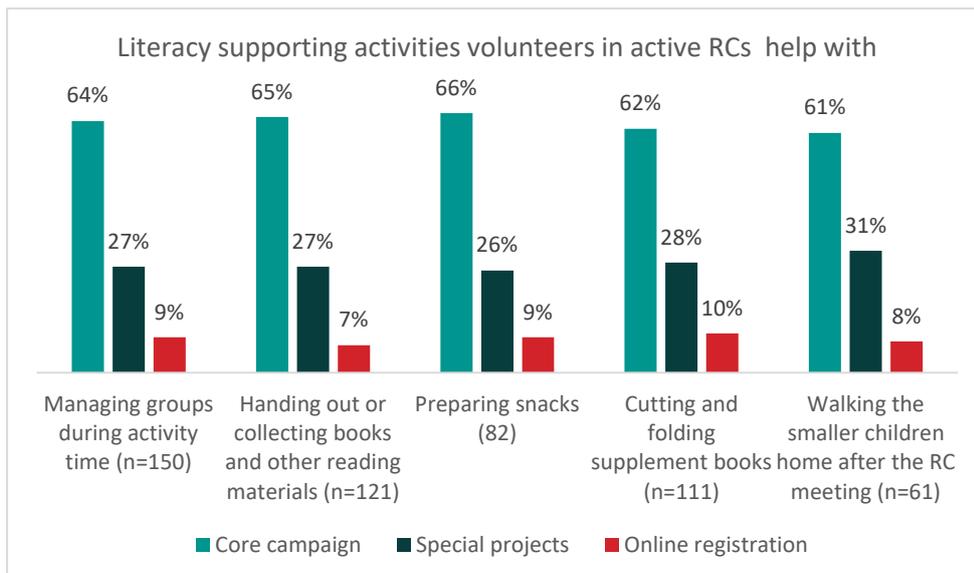


Figure 7: Literacy supporting activities volunteers help with in active RCs

The literacy support activities can be undertaken by older children at clubs. Of the 216 RCLs who indicated they have child volunteers at their clubs, 83% reported that the child volunteers never help.

The use of adult volunteers by core campaign clubs seems beneficial as these clubs mostly meet the ideal adult:child ratio of 1:15 or lower, as shown in Figure 8. In the same vein, the reported lower numbers of adult volunteers in the online registration RCs could be leading to fewer clubs with an ideal adult:child ratio. It is positive that overall, 63% of active RCs are meeting the threshold for the adult:child ratio. This varies from Nal'ibali monitoring data which showed that the ideal adult:child ratio was achieved in 52% RCs.

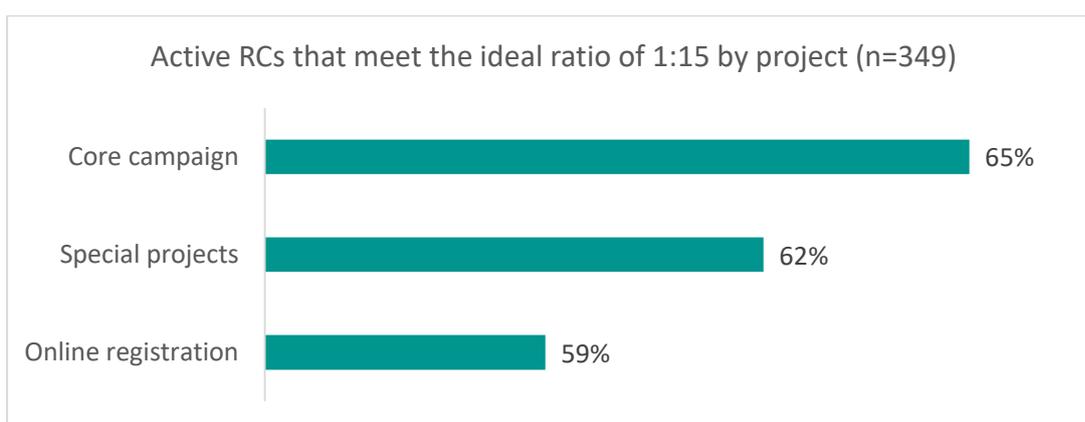


Figure 8: Adult: child ratio in Active RCs

Among inactive RCs, 94% (47) had an adult:child ratio of 1:15 and lower, and only three RCs seemed to have a ratio higher than 1:15. The ratio of adults:children varies by site, as shown in Figure 9.



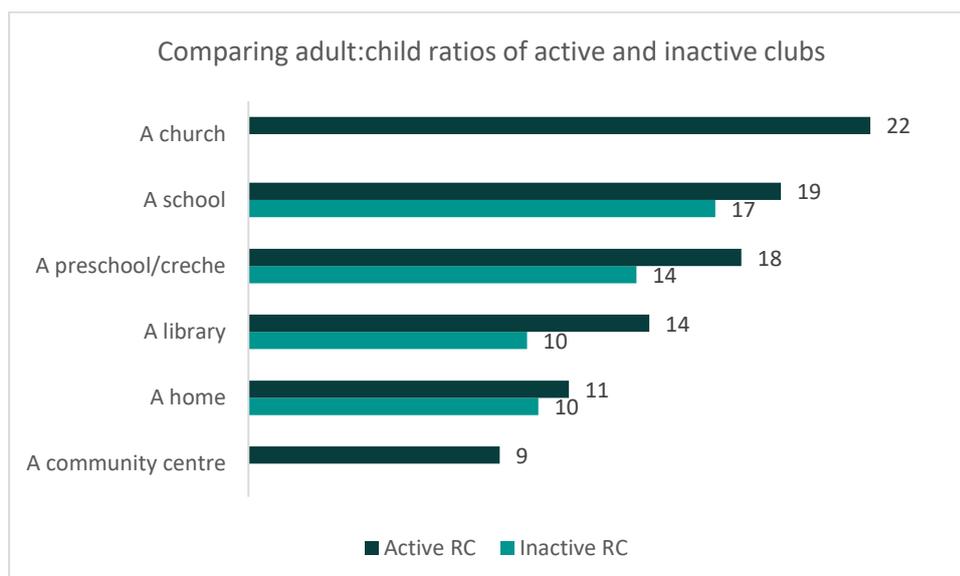


Figure 9: Comparison of adult:child ratios by site for active and inactive RCs

At school-based RCs, the ratio is high for both active and inactive clubs, while the ratio of adults: children is also higher than the ideal at preschools/crèches for active RCs. That the ratio is higher at school-based sites and is ideal at libraries and in homes is consistent with Nal’ibali’s monitoring data. However, there is some dissonance between the Nal’ibali monitoring data and the evaluation in terms of the ratio for preschools and ECD centres: according to the former, the ratio is ideal, whereas the evaluation found the adult:child ratio to be high in these RCs. Figure 9 shows that at an active RC held in a church, the adult:child ratio is exceptionally high, with 100 children and only one adult at the time of the data gathering. Overall, the data for inactive RCs shows that clubs at the different sites, except schools, were meeting the ideal adult:child ratio.

Although the general picture looks positive in as far as a majority of clubs are meeting the threshold for the adult:child ratio, a caveat needs to be added. The adult:child ratio was calculated by considering the reported number of children and adult volunteers in the clubs. However, the picture may change somewhat if the calculation factors in volunteers who never attend or sometimes attend to help. It would be useful for Nal’ibali to include a question about the frequency of help by volunteers in their monitoring data collection or survey tools so as to factor this into the calculations of the adult:child ratio. Table 14 gives an overview of frequency of assistance at RCs by adult volunteers.

Table 14: Overview of frequency of volunteer assistance at RC’s

Projects	Frequency of assistance by adult volunteers				Total
	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always	
Core campaign	9(7%)	33(24%)	36(26%)	60(43%)	138(100%)
Special projects	2(3%)	27(45%)	19(32%)	12(20%)	60(100%)
Online registration	1(6%)	4(22%)	7(39%)	6(33%)	18(100%)
Total	12(6%)	64(30%)	62(29%)	78(36%)	216(100%)



Notwithstanding the positive role that volunteers seem to be playing in lowering the adult:child ratio and assisting with both developmental and support activities, interviews and focus groups shed some light on project design issues that need to be considered for sustainability:

- Some volunteers are willing to assist and have a high level of agency, as evidenced by volunteers in one club who reported that they are fund raising for books for the club and others in a SPS RC who indicated that they would be willing to learn more about child behaviour so that they could support the children well when the SSs left the school.
- In poor communities with high unemployment rates, there seems to be expectation of employment when volunteers sign up, leading to withdrawal of services by volunteers if these prospects are not realised. A RCL commented:
- *The volunteers are only interested in the start of a RC, giving their time selflessly. Then with time, they leave or disappear because they start requesting to be compensated for helping and we do not have funds to do so.* (Interview with RCL)
- Related to high unemployment and volunteerism, there may be a perception in some communities that volunteering lessens the urgency by concerned authorities to address unemployment challenges. As such, the evaluation found out about a case of intimidation from a community member opposed to people volunteering. Volunteers in a focus group reported that they do not have any issues with Na'l'ibali but there are some issues in the community:

... there are challenges in the community. In the community there are people who say they will come and disrupt our sessions. During the school holidays we met with the Story Sparker and the children and there was a guy in the community who said if he hears that we are meeting he will come disrupt the session. Drunken people ask us whether we get paid in this useless thing we are doing or we come here just because we have nothing to do. (VFG discussion)

Overall, it was clear that there are some willing volunteers in communities but the socioeconomic conditions burden them. Therefore, it would be ideal if there were stipends to improve the economic challenges faced by volunteers so that they can continue to support RCs.

Parents

Although not directly members of RCs, parental involvement is key in sustaining reading at home. Based on site visit engagements, parental involvement is limited, which is one of the factors that challenged the research team's access to parents for FGDs. RCLs in only five of 25 RCs visited indicated that parents are involved at RCs. At one of the SPS RCs, it was reported that parents were keen to participate when invited to do so, but their participation waned once the RC graduated from the SPS project and SSs were no longer involved. One SS elaborated:

They are actually involved and even when I invite them here at school to come, they will come, they also help with activities and events, they never complain when they are needed, but in some schools when you leave their morale drops, for instance in some of my schools



from 2017 they have stopped and some will call me to find out what's going on, they will continue then when you are gone for a while or if they don't see you their morale goes back to dropping again and they stop getting involved at the school. (Interview with SS)

This suggests that after SSs leave, the Big 5 are not galvanising parental support in this school's RCs.

During interviews, RCLs in 20 active RCs and RCLs of four inactive clubs were explicit about lack of or limited involvement of parents in RCs. In most cases, the active RCLs invite parents to visit the RC to see what their children are doing, but parents do not take up the offer, as indicated by one RCL:

We've asked them over and over again: Come and sit in. Come and help. Then you can also see what's going on. We do invite. As you can see, only two parents showed [for the parent focus group]. That's now really the negative side of our parents. (RCL interview)

The parents who were interviewed during one of the FGDs conceded that they were not actively involved in the RC although one parent apportioned blame to the RCL, specifying that they would like to help but there have been no requests from the RC:

There is no information, they don't tell us that we have something like this [a RC] and we would like parents to assist and read for children. We only come when they call us. It would be better if they tell us to come maybe on Saturday to read for kids or they read for us. Also, we are busy with work and so we can't come unless it's communicated. (PFG).

Several reasons were provided for lack of or limited parental involvement, including socio-economic circumstances. In some clubs it was reported that parents work far away from their homes and grandparents look after the children and do not get involved in club activities as they are mostly unaware of what is happening. Some parents work on farms and cannot get time off to get involved in RCs. For some RCLs, it is good enough that parents allow their children to come to the RC: RCLs expressed gratitude for this, considering it the best form of parental involvement they could get.

A positive aspect involving parents that seems to be organically growing was highlighted at some RCs. Some parents reported that children are reading aloud to them, which they appreciate as they themselves cannot read. Children confirmed this in FGDs. In this regard, it can be argued that children are becoming literacy role models for illiterate adults. In other instances, children are asking their parents to read them supplements they take home and engaging with their parents about the stories read, direct outcomes of the campaign.

4.1.4 How children are recruited to RCs

A key principle of the campaign and of the RC ToC is that children should participate in RCs voluntarily. When asked to indicate how children are recruited to the RC, 39% of RCLs indicated that children are signed up to RCs by adults, as highlighted in Figure 10.



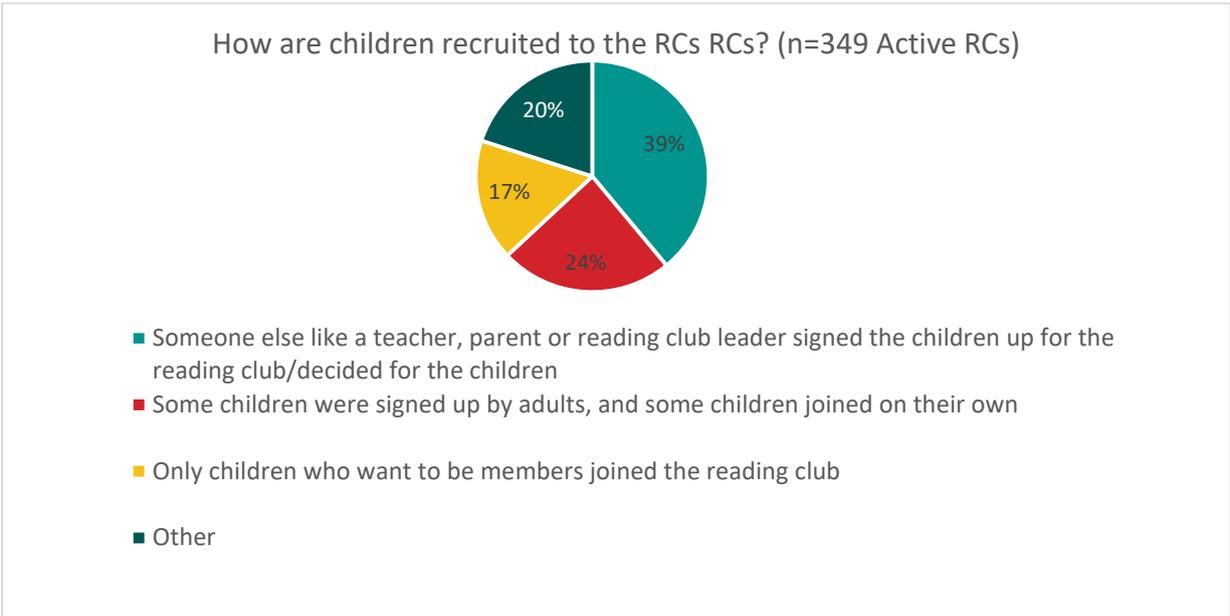


Figure 10: How children are signed up to RCs – Active RCs

Twenty four percent of RCLs indicated that some children are signed up by adults while others sign up on their own, and only 17% of RCLs indicated that children who want to be members join the RCs on their own. Other means through which children are recruited to the RCs were specified by 20% of active RCLs, and these means included door to door recruitment, recruiting children who had come to the library or from the crèche where a RC was located, children recruiting other children, children in programmes that partner with Nal’ibali joining automatically, and all children at crèches participating in the Nal’ibali network becoming members.

Analysis of the data by project shows that children in core campaign and special projects RCs were more likely to be signed up by adults (as reported by 40% of RCLs in each project) than children in online registration RCs, where only 29% of RCLs reported that children were signed up by adults. Furthermore, only 21% of RCLs reported that only children who wanted to be members joined. Figure 11 shows how children were recruited to RCs for the different projects.



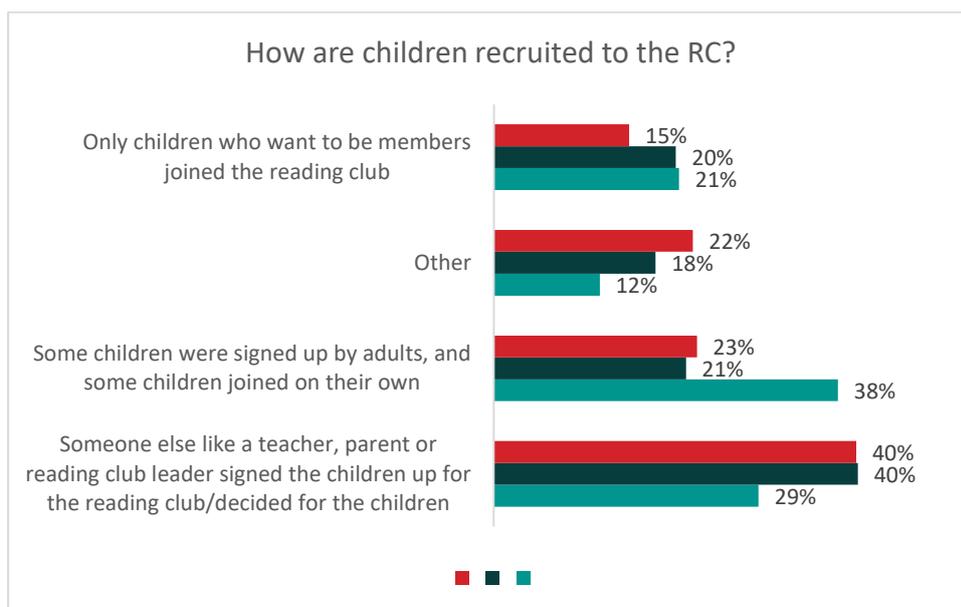


Figure 11: How children are recruited to the RC by project – Active RCs

Although adults mostly signed up children in core campaign and special projects RCs, some children also joined by choice (15% and 20% respectively). Children in education focused RCs were mostly signed by adults, as reported by 54% of RCLs in schools, followed by ECD centres/crèches, where 23% of RCLs indicated that adults signed up children. As the Na’ibali monitoring report (2019) highlights, it is not surprising that children in the core campaign and special projects RCs are mostly signed up by adults as these projects target schools and crèches, where the RC is most likely to be an integral part of the normal teaching programme. Hence, children whose RCs meet during school are most likely to have been recruited by an adult.

Proportionally, recruitment patterns for children were similar for inactive RCs, where 21(42%) RCLs indicated that adults signed up children. Eight (16%) RCLs reported that some adults signed up children and some children signed up by themselves, and nine(18%) RCLs reported that only children who wanted to join signed up.

On the matter of signing children up to join RCs, it is useful to make a distinction between children being signed up by adults and children’s willingness to attend RC meetings. It is not a negative thing for children to be signed up for a beneficial programme by adults, but it would be inappropriate to force children to attend. A special case of respecting children’s choice to attend RC meetings was observed at one of the visited clubs and is documented in textboxes 1 & 2.

Textbox 1: Respecting the wishes of children to participate or not to participate in a RC session

A small group of boys stood to one side and observed the RC proceedings. The volunteer indicated that they were too shy to join the group on the blanket because of the presence of the researchers. Although she invited them to join the group, she did not persist when they refused. Interestingly, they drew closer as the reading session progressed, and by the end of the session, formed part of the group on the blanket, but a few of them remained standing.



Textbox 2: Respecting the wishes of children to participate or not to participate in a RC activity

After 5min (into the story), two of the boys in the group became uninterested and proceeded to go play with toys by the corner. The teacher didn't seem to mind and just requested that they keep it down so that the other children can continue listening to the story.

Clearly, at this RC, the children were not forced to participate in RC activities, and the RCL respected their choices.

Children's free will to participate in RC activities was confirmed during CFG discussions, where all the children who participated indicated that they were very happy to be members of a RC because they do fun activities, they read interesting books, write, tell stories and "*they can ask questions*". Asked whether there was anything they did not like about the club, most children indicated that they liked everything about the club, and for the few children who indicated that there were some things they did not like about the club, these things were related to specific incidents in clubs and not to the children's attendance, for example, some mentioned that they did not like children who laughed at those who could not read, or those who teased others and called them names. In one focus group, while some children indicated that they did not like isiZulu because they could not get a job at a call centre (a misconception), another child said they did not like English because it was not their home language.

Most of the RCLs reported that there was excellent attendance at RCs by children. More than 90% of RCLs indicated a steady stream of attendance by the same children. Variation in attendance, with children coming and going as they please, was reported by less than 10% of respondents. During RC site visits, it was observed that RC sizes varied from 10-50 children, and volunteers at one of the SPS RCs indicated that attendance at school based RCs was very good compared to attendance at community based RCs. Critically, the volunteers indicated that although attendance may be poor at community based RCs, in their experience, children who love to read attend and others would attend if there were sweets and chips to entice them:

When I look at it, when they are at home they are not interested. If we have something to give them like sweets or chips, they become interested. In actual fact a lot of them come to attend. You know children are not the same, if you don't give them something only a few will come, those who love reading. (VFG discussion)

The use of incentives to attract children to come to RCs (a phenomenon cited in the literature review) was also cited by a RCL who indicated that interest in the RC peaked when the club introduced incentives in the form of chocolates:

The library was full and they were willing to read because they received a reward in the form of a chocolate. (Interview with RCL)



Nal’ibali does not supply snacks or other edible incentives. Some RCLs indicated that they buy snacks for children, spending on average R30.00 per meeting. Some children at RCs run in schools benefit from food from the school nutrition programme.

4.1.5 Frequency and duration of RC meetings

The quality framework defines dosage as a quality focus area with two dimensions: frequency and duration of RC meetings. The Nal’ibali *Module 3 Training Participants Notes* (Nal’ibali, n.d.c) recommends that RCs should meet at least once a week. No guidelines are provided in the training manual or the ToC about RC meeting duration, and for the purposes of this evaluation, it was agreed in the quality framework that for RC meetings to be effective, they should be at least 45 minutes long each time the RC meets.

The majority of the RCs (55%) meet after school, while 39% meet during schools. Most core campaign (58%) and online registration (71%) RCs meet after school, while most special projects clubs (52%) meet during school hours, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15: When RC sessions take place for active RCs by project

Project	After school hours	During school hours
Core Campaign	132 (58%)	82 (36%)
Special Projects	37 (42%)	46 (52%)
Online Registration	24 (71%)	8 (24%)

Broadly, 66% of the RCs have meetings that last for at least 45 minutes each, thereby meeting the Nal’ibali standard, as shown in Figure 12.

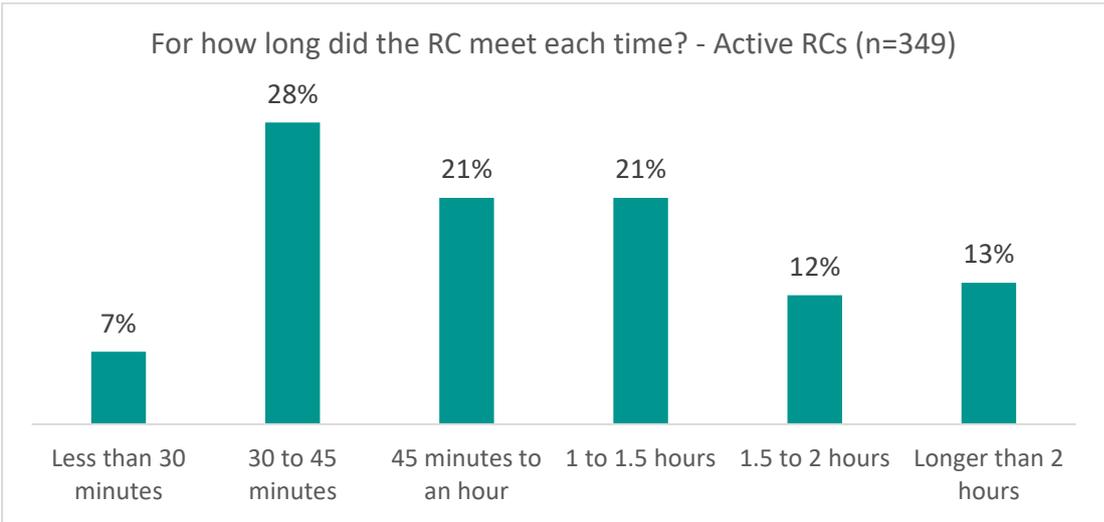


Figure 12: Duration of active RC meetings

There seems to be a strong association between venue, time of meeting and duration of meetings. The RCs that meet and exceed the Nal’ibali guidelines for duration the most are online registration



RCs, with 75% of them meeting for at least 45 minutes at a time, followed by core campaign clubs (68%) and special projects (52%), as highlighted in Figure 13.

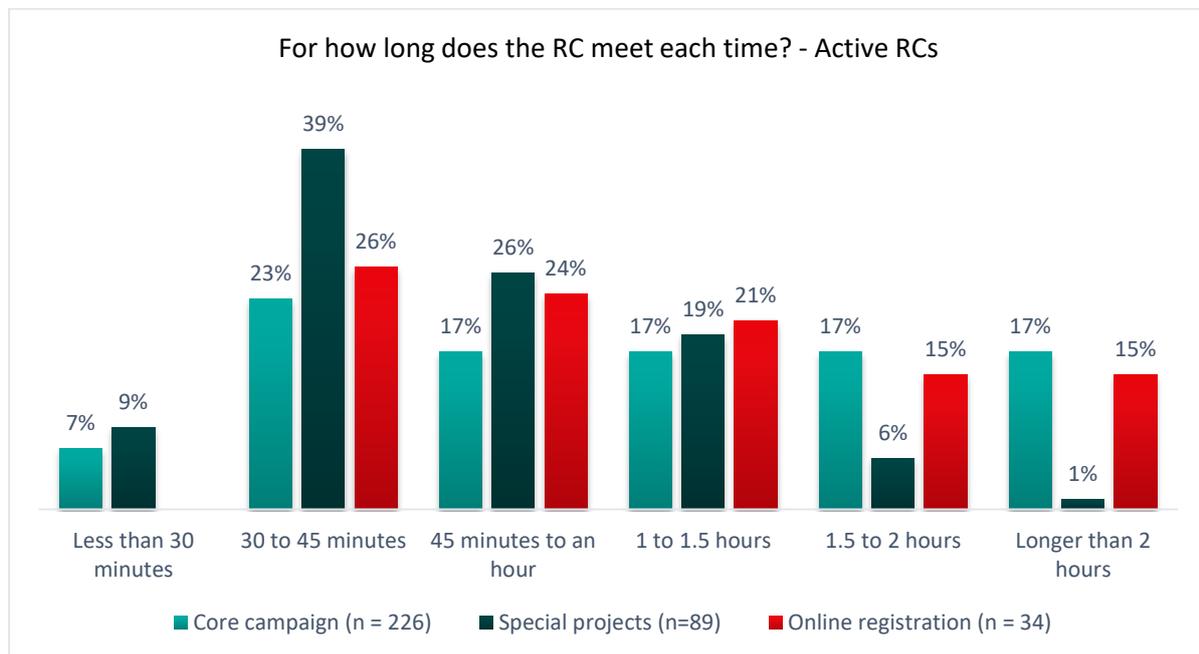


Figure 13: Duration of active RC meetings by project

The special projects RCs are mostly based in schools, and they are the fewest that meet the threshold for duration. It could be that working in a structured environment of a school limits the RC's ability to run for at least 45 minutes, as the RC meetings must be aligned with the rest of the school programme. This has implications for the nuances to be considered in the quality framework in the future; composite indicators that consider, for example, duration and venue or duration and age of children may be needed.

Figure 14 shows that most of the active RCs (97%) meet at least once a week, thereby aligning with Nal'ibali's envisaged ideal practice.



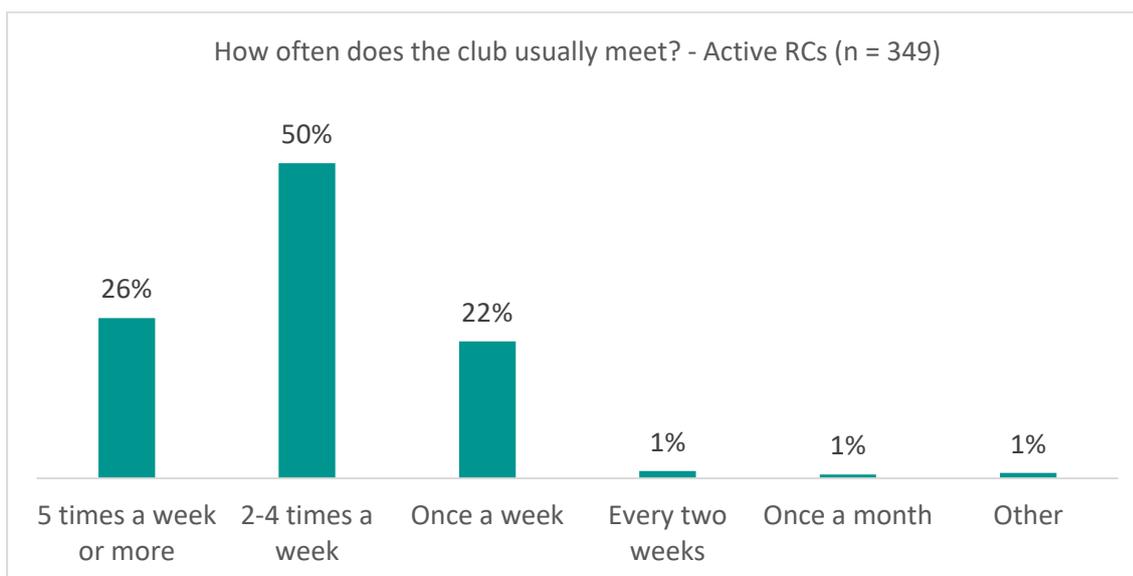


Figure 14: Frequency of meeting by all active RCs

Ninety seven percent of core campaign RCs meet more than once a week, as do 99% of special projects RCs and 94% of online registration RCs. The high frequency of meetings is positive for reinforcing the reading habits of children. Missing values in Nal’ibali data could explain variances between monitoring and survey data on the frequency of meetings of RCs, as reflected in Table 16.²⁷

Table 16: Comparing database and survey data on frequency of meeting for active RCs

Frequency of meeting	Database	Survey	Variance
5 times a week or more	515 (19%)	89 (26%)	-7%
2-3 times a week	850 (31%)	175 (50%)	-19%
Once a week	996 (37%)	76 (22%)	15%
Every two weeks	53 (2%)	4 (1%)	1%
Once a month	33 (1%)	2 (1%)	0%
Every 2-3 months	1 (0%)	0	1%
Less often	1 (0%)	0	1%
During the school holidays	1 (0%)	0	1%
Other	55 (2%)	3 (1%)	1%
Missing	201 (7%)	0	7%
Total	2 706 (100%)	349 (100%)	

While most of the variances are small and not that concerning, the variances for meeting 2-3 times a week and once a week are higher in the survey than in Nal’ibali’s monitoring data and this should be monitored in the next round of data gathering. Because Nal’ibali’s monitoring data includes missing

²⁷ These will be checked against the precision of the survey findings in the next iteration of the report.



values for 7% and other values for 2%, it is likely that the current survey is more accurate and suggests that clubs meet more frequently than Nal'ibali's monitoring data suggests.

4.1.6 Key insights

- Nal'ibali training is a key catalytic factor in the formation of RCs – reported by 184 (53%) active RCLs and 32 (64%) inactive RCLs.
- Most RCs in the sample are teacher run and meet in schools (49%) and preschools/crèches (18%). Special projects RCs are mostly run in schools.
- Core campaign and online registration clubs also meet in homes, libraries, community centres and churches.
- 89% of RCLs are black African who are linguistically diverse, and this increases the number of role models in poor black communities that have traditionally not had opportunities to read for pleasure.
- Most RCs in schools are teacher run and meet mostly during school hours, probably converting whole classes into RCs, hence the high proportion of children recruited to the RC by an adult.
- Parental involvement in RCs is limited because of parents' lack of awareness about RC activities and because parents are working when RCs are being run.
- 97% of the clubs meet the quality threshold for frequency of meetings by meeting at least once a week.
- Child volunteers in 83% of the RCs never help the RCL.
- 66% of RCs meet the quality threshold of meeting for 45 minutes each time the RC meets. Most clubs that do not meet the threshold are school based clubs, which highlights how difficult it is for clubs to meet for at least 45 minutes when they are working within the structure of a school day.

4.2 Access to resources

One of Nal'ibali's aims as articulated in the ToC for the campaign and for RCs is that adults and children have access to a wide variety of relevant, engaging reading materials in all South African languages. To evaluate whether the Nal'ibali project was improving members' access to reading resources, the evaluation sought to answer the following question: **To what extent are reading clubs improving access to reading materials for children and adults participating in the reading clubs?**

The evaluation wanted to establish the type of reading materials available, their quantity, how often they are refreshed, the availability of other literacy development materials, languages of the reading materials, and sources of materials. The quality threshold for reading materials is for a club to have at least two of the core reading materials (supplements, own books, library books) and, for other



literacy development materials, at least one type of writing material and one type of paper. Using both survey and site visit data, this section discusses availability of resources in RCs.

4.2.1 What kinds of resources and reading materials are available?

Core reading materials

As indicated earlier, Nal’ibali produces a bi-weekly bilingual supplement which is accessed by 51% of returning RCs (as at the end of June 2019, according to the Nal’ibali monitoring report). Broadly, there seems to be greater scarcity of supplements and library books than of own books. Quantities of core resources are limited to 10 and fewer in most of the clubs, which is inadequate given the research evidence that having 20 books in a home is a strong predictor of future academic success (Evans et al, 2010). Figure 15 provides an overview of quantities of core resources in all sampled RCs.

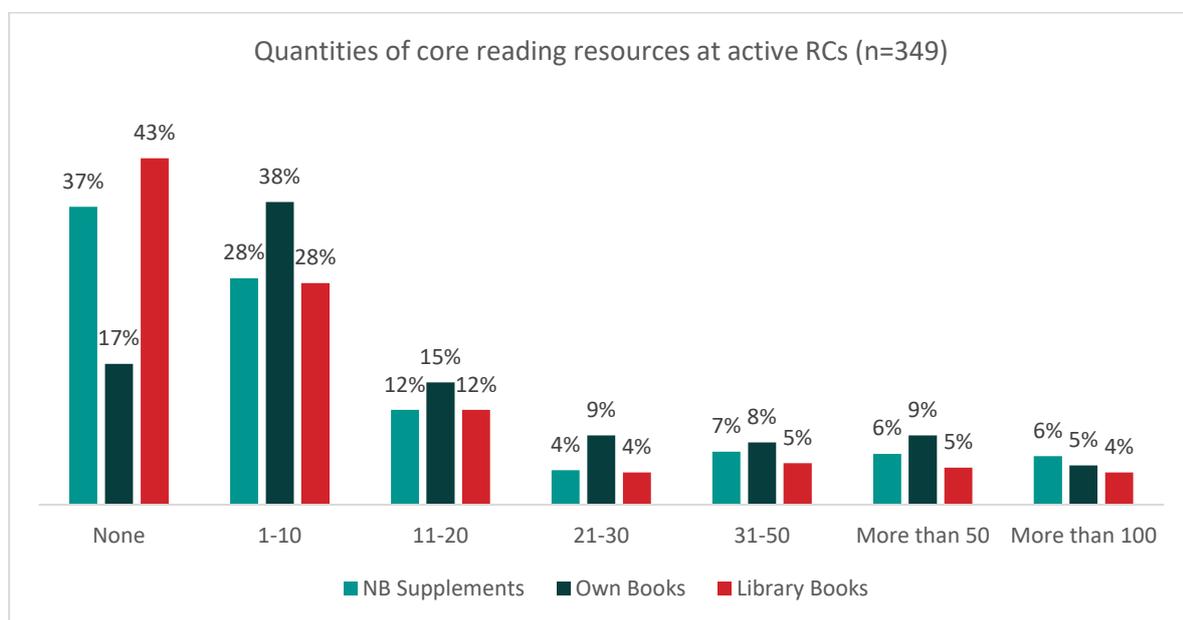


Figure 15: Type and quantity of reading resources at RCs

The scarcity of supplements was observed at six of the 22 RCs that were visited; the six did not have supplements because they were still waiting for them after registering the RC. Figure 16 shows a comparison of access to core resources by type of resource and type of project.

- Special projects are the most well-resourced clubs, with only 12% indicating they do not have supplements and 32% indicating they have more than 20 of their own books.
- Online registration RCs have a dire shortage of supplements and library books, but good quantities of own books – 39% of these clubs have more than 20 of their own books.
- 42% of core campaign RCs have 10 or fewer books, and 29% have more than 20 of their own books.
- Access to library books is constrained for all clubs, with more than 40% of each club type indicating they have no library books.



- Generally, quantities of own and library books are limited with most clubs having 20 books or fewer.

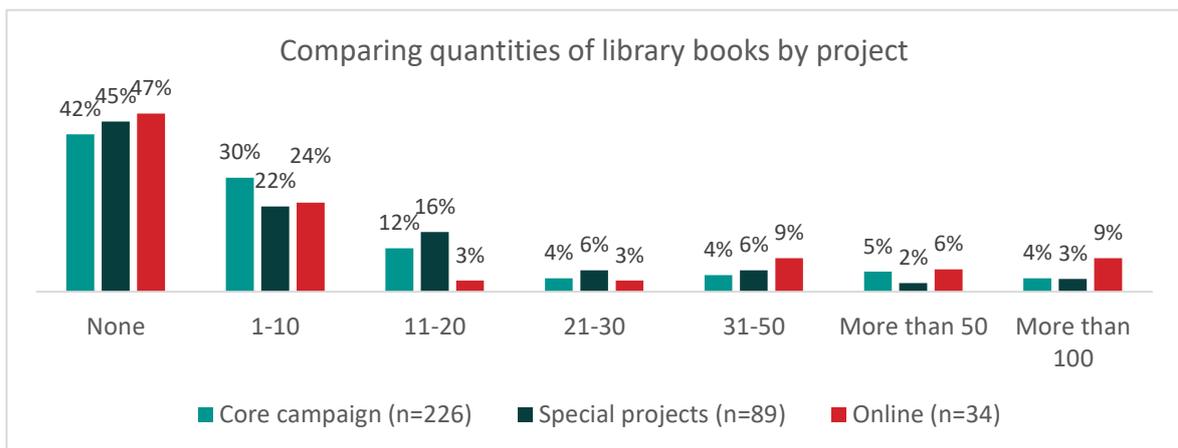
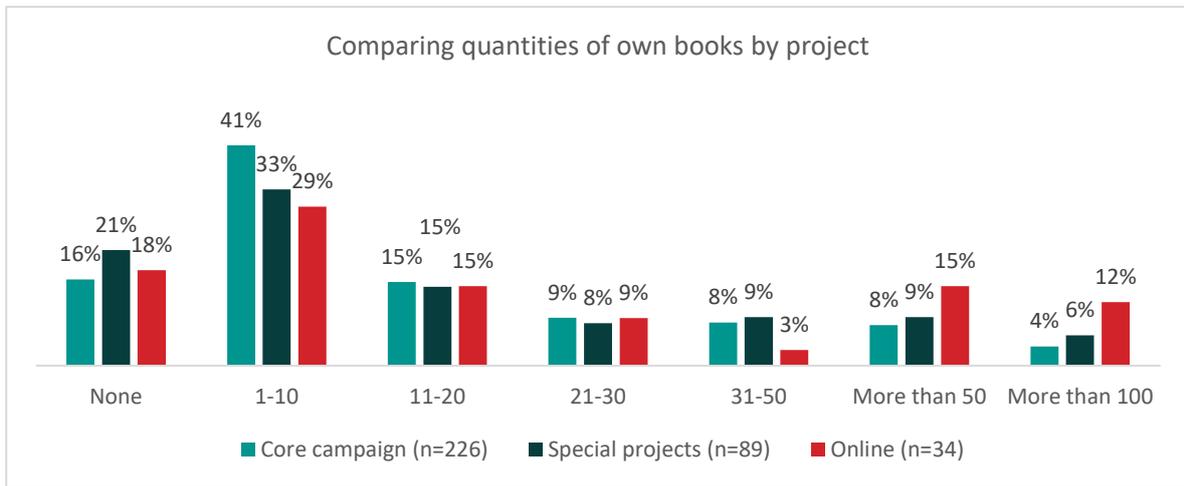
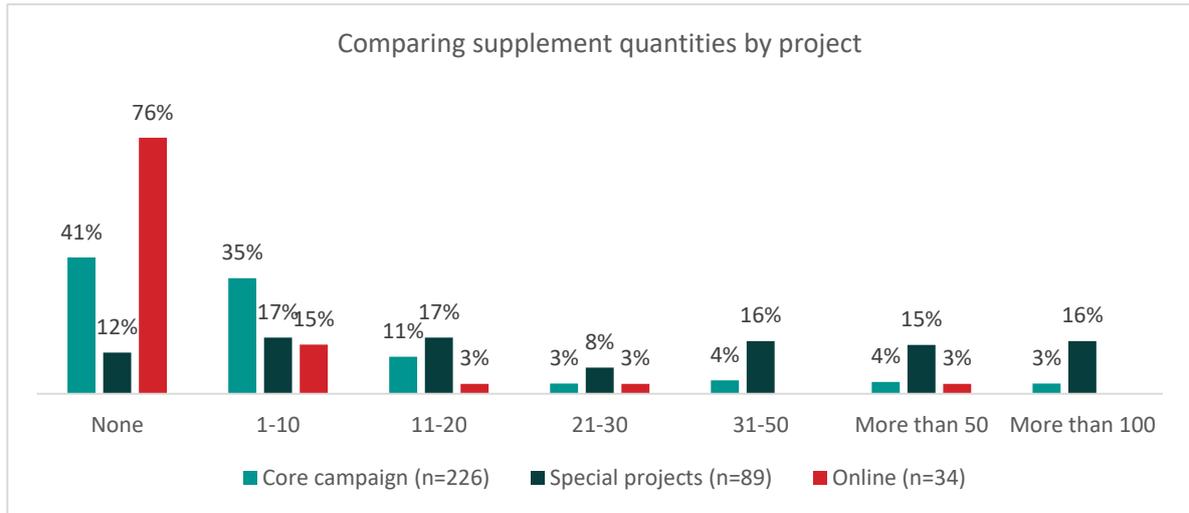


Figure 16: Quantities of core resources by project

Despite the concern with the limited quantities of core reading resources for all clubs, overall, survey results show a positive outlook regarding quality of reading resources - 74% of all active RCs have at



least two of the core resources. The extent to which the RCs in different projects meet this threshold is in line with Nal'ibali resourcing of these projects:

- 84% of special projects, which are all supposed to get supplements and story books as well, meet the threshold.
- 75% of core campaign projects, which get supplements and other materials, depending on whether they are on the distribution list, meet the threshold.
- 47% of online registration RCs, that mostly do not attend training and may not be on the supplement distribution list for supplements, meet the threshold.

Other reading resources

In light of the fact that there is inequitable access to the core resources, the analysis turned to the use of website stories and found that these are under-utilised - only 30% of RCLs indicated they utilise website stories. Online registration clubs report the highest access to website stories (53%), followed by special projects RCs (31%), then core campaign clubs (27%). The option for digital resource utilisation is presented differently in the monitoring data as online content with 43% of RCLs indicating they utilise online content. The variance is rather high (13%) for utilisation of website resources between the survey and monitoring data.

Another useful resource whose level of access was explored was dictionaries. Survey data highlighted low access, revealing that:

- 69% of all RCs do not have dictionaries.
- The biggest scarcity of dictionaries is among special projects clubs – 76% indicated they do not have dictionaries, followed by 74% of online registration clubs and 65% of core campaign clubs.

During site visits, we observed that nine RCs did not have dictionaries and seven clubs only had one dictionary each. Dictionaries are useful for learning to read with understanding, especially as children discover new words. In this regard, bilingual dictionaries ought to form the repertoire of resources that RCs should have, especially for clubs with no supplements as is explained in the following subsection.

4.2.2 Languages of reading materials

There is a high level of alignment between the languages used in RCs and the resources in those languages as reflected in Figure 17.



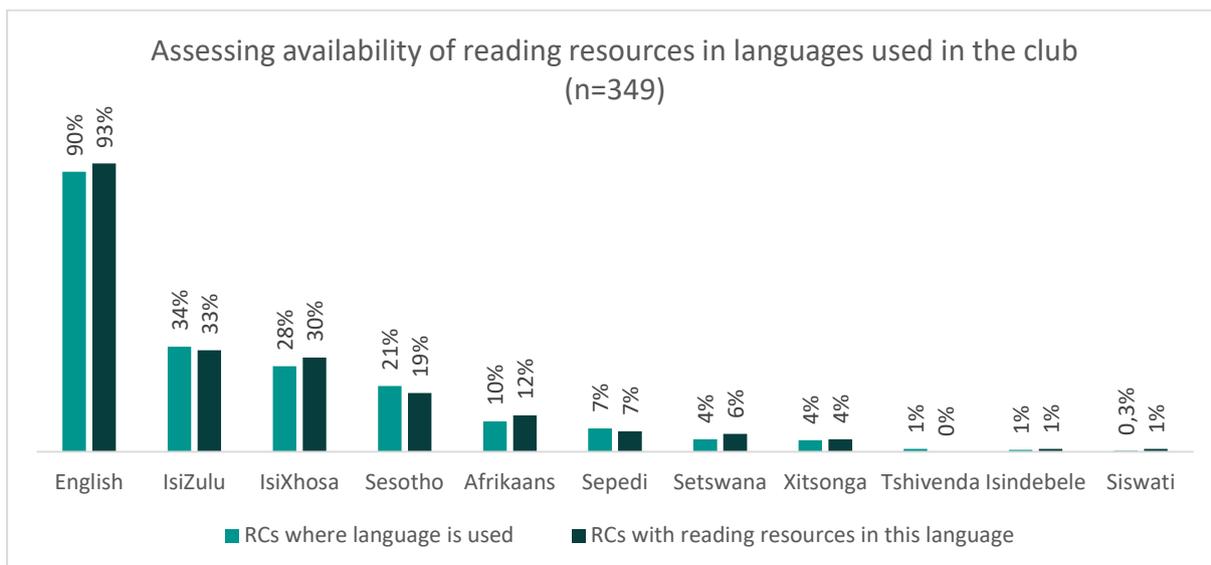


Figure 17: Languages of reading materials at all RCs

There was a lack of reading resources in Tshivenda at clubs that use this language. Use of children’s home language and having resources in the children’s home languages can both have positive effects – having materials in the children’s home languages is most likely to encourage use of the children’s home languages, in the same way that using the children’s home languages in the club is also likely to promote active sourcing of materials in these languages.

Thirty-four (68%) of surveyed inactive RCLs indicated that they had reading materials in the home languages of the children at their clubs. This was more so for 12 (92%) of special projects RCs and 18 (62%) of core campaign RCs. Only half of the eight online registration RCs who answered this question indicated they had reading materials in the home languages of the children.

Although there is high matching of reading materials in the home languages used at the clubs, bilingual dictionaries can help children explore what the new words they are learning in English mean and what their equivalent is in their home language. The importance of dictionaries can be deduced from a RCL at one site who indicated that he photocopies and distributes pages from dictionaries so that children can learn new words. Recognising the importance of dictionaries in reading, one club has started compiling its own in the absence of actual dictionaries:

We asked parents to buy the children dictionaries, in the meantime while they have not bought them; we started a project in which all children should put together their own dictionaries using a book. (RCL interview)

Dictionaries are, however, more important in the clubs that are not receiving supplements. Bilingual supplements support vocabulary building because the words are used in context in the stories children are reading, discussing and acting out, and the supplements are cheaper than dictionaries. In this regard, better distribution of dictionaries can adequately make up for lack of dictionaries



4.2.3 Where is the material sourced?

RCLs were asked where they get the reading materials they have, and Nal'ibali was cited as the main source by 62% of active RCLs. The library was the next best source, with 52% indicating that they get reading materials from the library, and 27% reported they buy books. The RCLs who indicated that they buy books are varied and include full time employed, unemployed and those in part time employment. The same percentage of inactive RCs (62% - 31 clubs) indicated they got their reading materials from Nal'ibali, only 17(34%) got reading materials from the library and 17(34%) bought them. Reports of community donations of reading materials were quite significant for both active RCs (26%) and inactive RCs (14 - 28%). Figure 18 gives an overview of sources of reading materials²⁸ for active RCs.

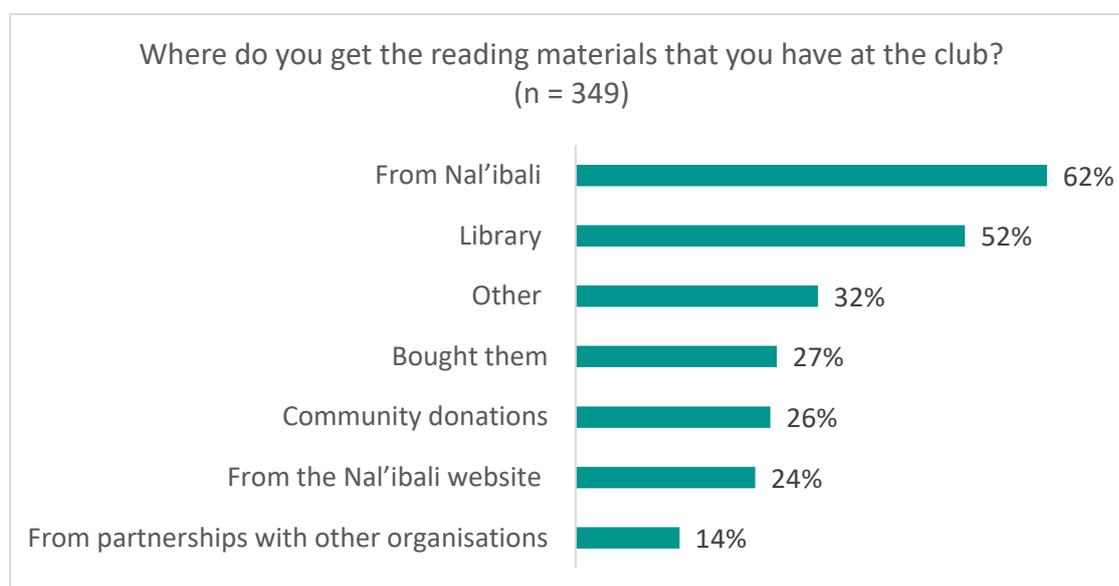


Figure 18: Sources of reading resources for active RCs

Other sources of reading materials for active RCs include the school, which is a major source of reading materials, with 63% of RCLs indicating they get reading materials from schools. It was also reported that children bring in reading materials and write their own stories. The school was also a source of reading materials for 17 out of 22 (77%) inactive RCs. This highlights a positive aspect regarding having school-based venues for RCs in schools that are fairly well resourced with reading materials.

When disaggregated by project, Nal'ibali is the main source of reading materials for the core campaign and special projects active and inactive RCs. The main sources of reading materials for online registration RCs is the library (50%) and the Nal'ibali website (41%). Figure 19 shows the multiple sources of reading materials for active RCs by project.

²⁸ The question "Where do you get the reading materials that you have at the club?" was a multiple response options question.



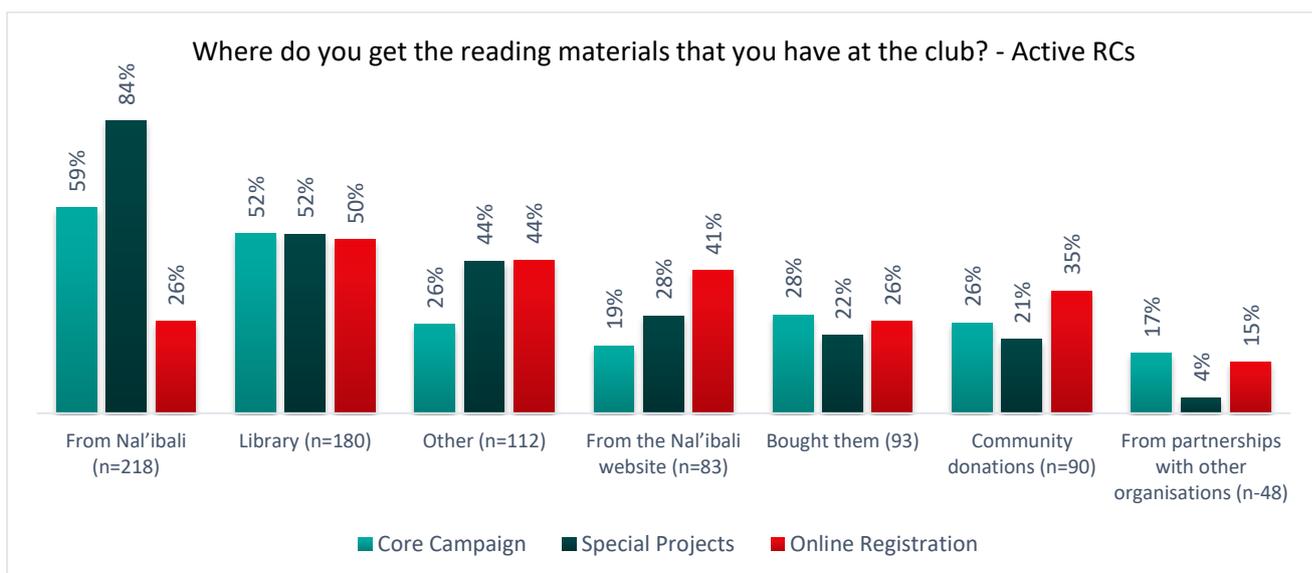


Figure 19: Source of reading materials by project²⁹ – active RCs

While there is limited use of library books by those at other venues, the site visits to schools showed how spoilt for choice children who meet at school libraries are as there are diverse reading resources with too many books to count at school library venues.

Figure 19 also shows that active online registration clubs have substantially more community donated reading materials than the other projects. This was not the case with inactive RCs where only two out of eight (25%) of the clubs reported receiving community donated reading materials.

4.2.4 Challenges of sourcing reading materials and how they are addressed

When asked what challenges they experience in finding reading materials for their RCs, 23% of active RCLs indicated that there are no challenges. For the RCLs who highlighted that they face many challenges in finding materials for their RC, 296 qualitative codes were generated, and the challenges are summarised in Table 18.

Table 17: Challenges experienced by active RCLs in finding materials for their reading clubs

Challenge experienced in finding materials	Code count
Inadequate sources of materials (for example reading material, stationery, charts, and posters)	75 (25%)
Lack of funding to buy materials	73 (25%)
Library access limited or not possible, library not well stocked with relevant materials, library far away	47 (16%)
Difficulty finding enough RC resources (number of reading resources compared to number of children)	45 (15%)
Lack of support from community, parents, and Nal'ibali	25 (8%)
Children stop attending when there is a limited quantity of reading materials, as they get bored	13 (4%)
Access to internet facilities and printing not available	18 (6%)

²⁹ Multiple response options were allowed.



Challenge experienced in finding materials	Code count
Total	296 (100%)

The most common challenge for active RCLs is finding enough sources, i.e. failing to find enough suppliers/donors of the requisite resources, followed by lack of funding to buy materials, then several library related challenges including distance of library and limited stock in the library. Similar challenges were experienced by inactive RCLs - of the 37 codes related to challenges in finding resources, the most common (19 codes) relate to finding enough resources for the number of children in the RC, lack of funding (9 codes), the distance to the library was too far (5 codes), and lack of awareness about sponsors of reading materials (4 codes).

Given the challenges experienced in sourcing reading materials, RCLs were asked what they have personally done to increase the reading resources in their RCs. Figure 20, which highlights that almost all the RCLs had taken some agency to address the reading resource shortage in their RCs, summarises the strategies they used.

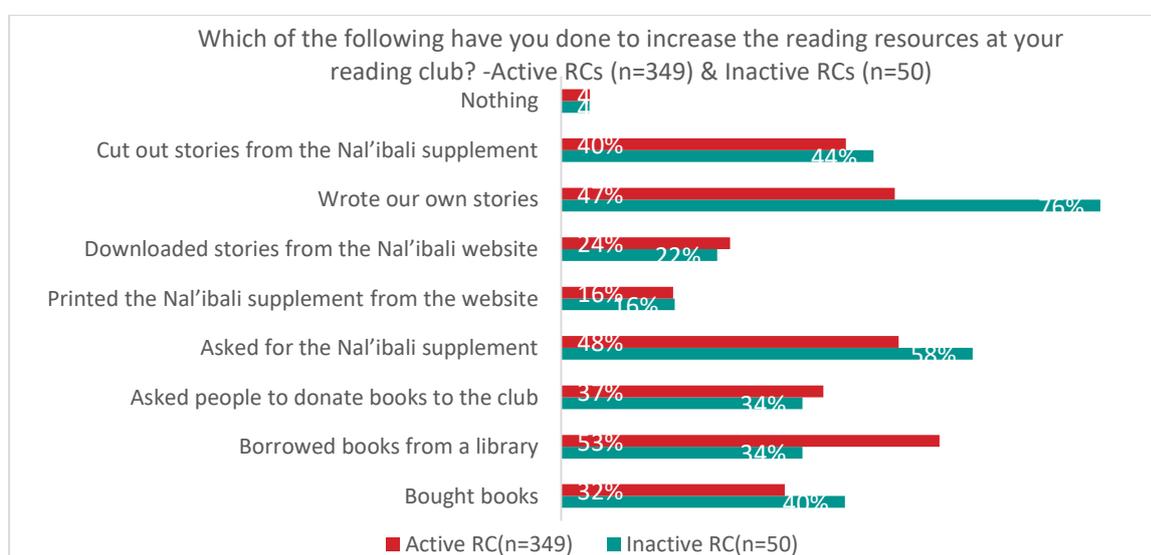


Figure 20: RCL agency in increasing access to reading materials³⁰ at their RCs

For both active and inactive RCs, the most common strategies for increasing reading materials are writing their own stories, asking Nal'ibali for the supplement and cutting out stories from the supplement. Active RCs also borrow books from the library to a significant extent.

More than half of the RCLs in the core campaign and online registration projects are members of a public library (54%), compared to only 40% of special projects RCLs. A possible reason for this is that between Nal'ibali supplements and books sourced from the school libraries and the school, the special projects RCLs may not value library membership much as they already have access to diverse resources.

³⁰ This was a multiple response options question.



Half of the active RCLs have library membership³¹ compared to 15(30%) of inactive RCLs that had, and 54% active RCLs borrow books from the library. Relative to proximity of libraries to the RCs (see Figure 21), core campaign and special projects RCLs seem to be extracting the most value from libraries in terms of RCL membership, taking out books from the library for use at the club, and taking the children to the library although the children may be taking out books from the library to a limited extent. Relative to the proximity of libraries to the RCs, there is a limited percentage of online registration RCLs with library membership. However, the online registration RCLs with membership seem to be extracting good value out of libraries as they all borrow books for their clubs from the library,³² take children to the library, and, as far as they are concerned, children borrow books from the library. Figure 21 also gives an overview of the utilisation of public libraries by RCLs. The bars for the first five questions reflect “Yes” responses and the bars for the last question reflect RCLs who picked the library as a source of reading materials.

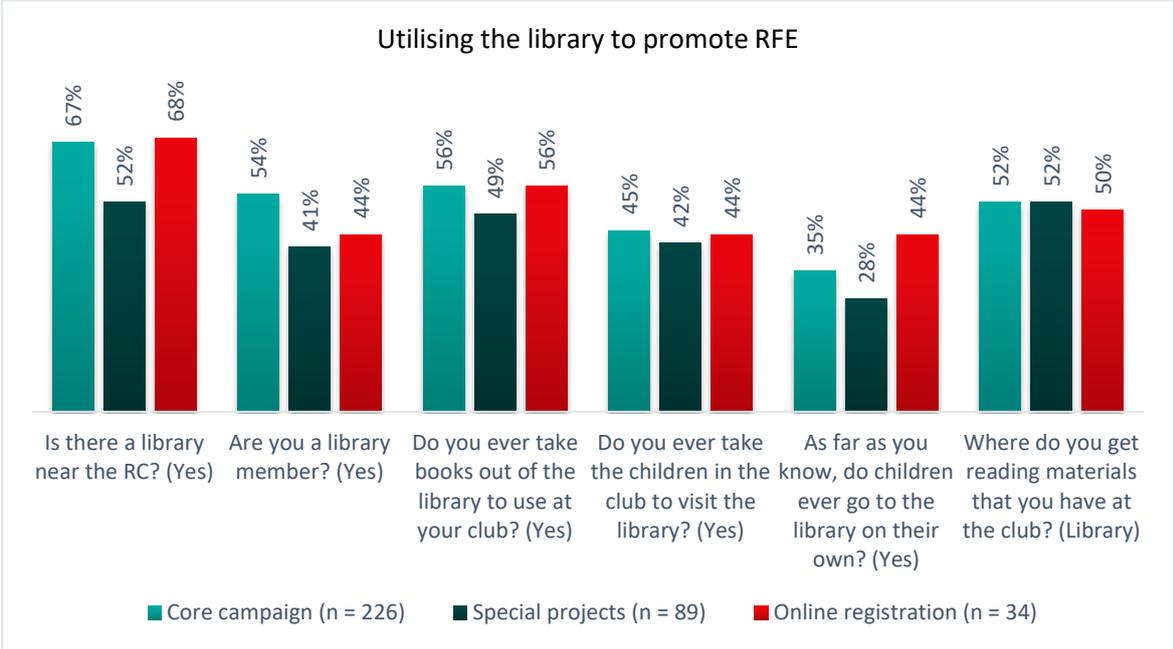


Figure 21: Utilising the library to access reading materials – active RCs

For all RCs, there is some potential to further exploit the proximity of libraries to the RCs.

³¹ Although the questions in relation to library proximity, membership and use seem to be clear that the focus is public libraries, during site visits, it was not always clear whether RCLs and children and volunteers were clear about the distinction between public and school libraries. This distinction has to be made starker in future research.

³² The percentage of online registration RCLs who borrow books from the library far exceeds that of RCLs with membership. During the site visits, a RCL indicated that she does not have membership but the library lets her borrow books because they know her. Volunteers from a different RC divulged that they also borrow books from a public library even when they do not have membership. That some people can borrow books from a public library without membership could explain the discrepancy between online registration RCL membership and those who borrow books from the library.



4.2.5 How often is material refreshed?

Besides diversity in reading materials, children also need different and new reading materials to stay engaged. The evaluation sought to understand the frequency of refreshment of reading materials, and the analysis here focuses on non-Nal’ibali reading materials, i.e. own books and library books. The analysis also determined the extent to which RCs meet the quality threshold ‘club refreshes own books or library books at least twice a year’ for the dimension refreshment of non-Nal’ibali resources in the quality framework.

Overall, 21% of RCs who indicated they have own books never refresh their own books, and 38% of those who mentioned they have library books indicated that they never refresh library books (37%)³³. Most commonly, own books are refreshed once a year (22%), and library books are refreshed weekly (29%). Forty percent of RCs refresh own books either weekly, monthly or every three months, and 54% of RCs refresh library books either weekly, monthly or every three months. Figure 22 disaggregates refreshment of own books by project.

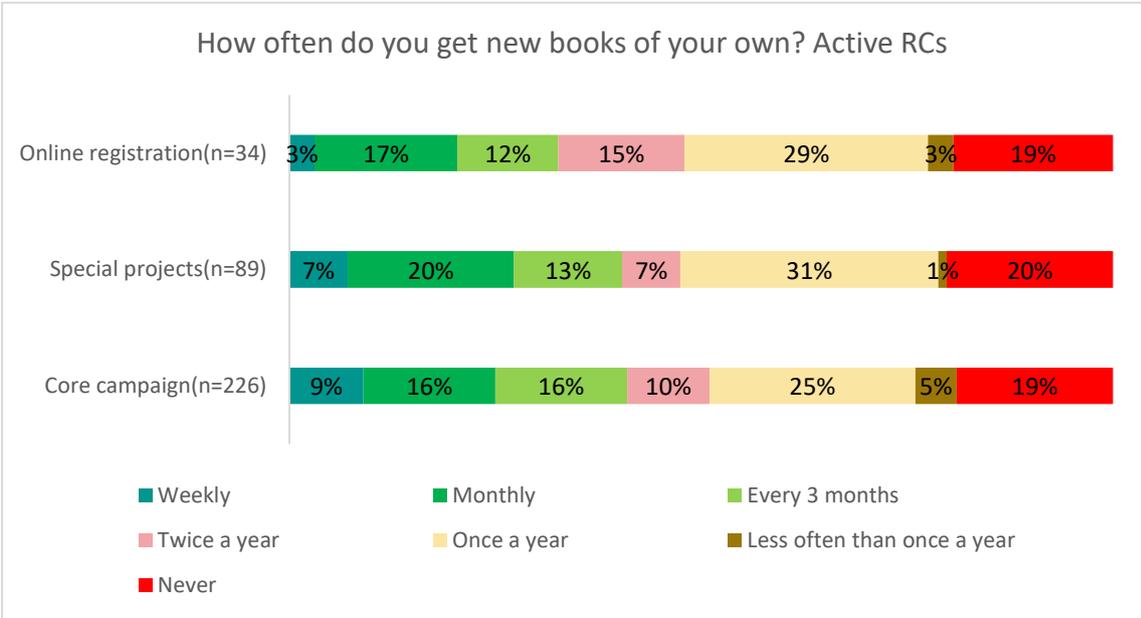


Figure 22: Frequency of refreshment of own books by active RCs

The proportion of RCs that never refresh their own books is the same for online registration and core campaign RCs and slightly higher for special projects. The differences between refreshment of own books weekly, monthly, and every three months is very small.

Similarly, the proportion of RCs that never refresh library books is similar across RCs of different projects. Figure 23 disaggregates refreshment of library books by project.

³³ This question may have been misunderstood to mean how often do you get (different) books from the school library and the response here may be referring to restocking of the school library. The “never” response could be signaling that the school library never gets new books.



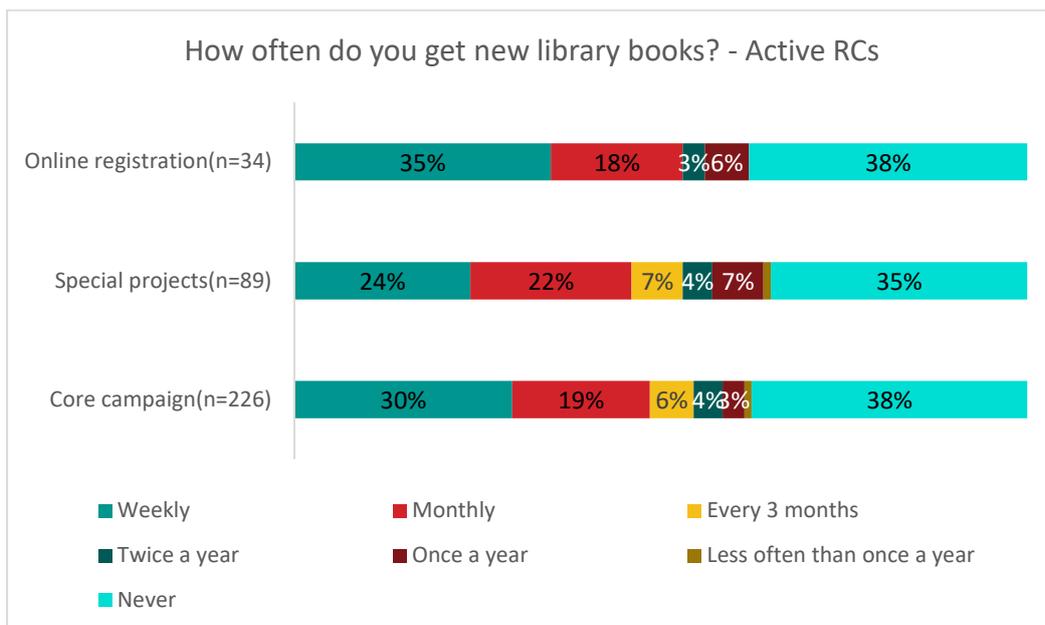


Figure 23: Refreshment of library books by active RCs

The high percentage of RCs renewing their library books weekly, monthly and every three months is positive in ensuring that children always have new and different reading materials.

Where refreshment of own books and library books is considered, 72% of all RCs meet the threshold for refreshment of own and library books at least twice a year.

4.2.6 Other literacy development materials

Besides reading, the Nal'ibali RFE campaign promotes use of drawing and writing to enable children to interpret stories through these methods. Drawing and writing material is regarded as other literacy development materials in the quality framework, and the quality threshold for this dimension is: club has at least one type of writing material (crayons, pens, kokis, pencils), and one type of paper (books to write in, writing and/or drawing paper).

Nal'ibali has not supplied writing and drawing resources, and RCs have sourced the writing, drawing and creative arts materials themselves. Figure 24 presents the data on other literacy development materials that are available in RCs. More than half of the RCs have a form of writing implement and paper.



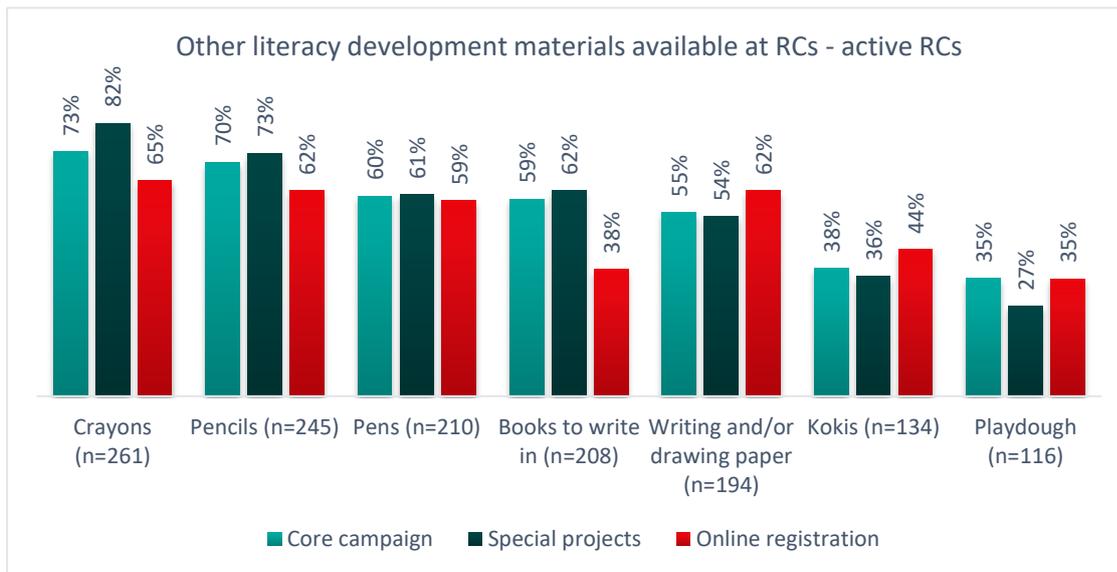


Figure 24: Other literacy development resources at RCs

However, the availability of kokis and playdough is limited for all types of projects, with less than 45% of clubs having these materials.

Online registration RCs consistently have the least of all the types of writing, drawing and creative arts materials, except for drawing and writing paper: sizeably more online registration RCs have this material as compared to core campaign and special projects RCs. Special projects RCs have the most crayons (82%), pencils (73%) and pens (61%). During site visits where drawing activities were done, there was much sharing of crayons because there were not enough. Many RCLs indicated that they buy paper and crayons with their own money, and some clubs in schools get these writing and drawing resources from the school, a further advantage of having RCs located in schools, if the schools have resources.

Overall, 67% of active RCLs meet the quality threshold for the dimension of other literacy development materials.

4.2.7 Resource requirements

RCs were specifically asked what resources they do not have enough of (active RCs) or did not have enough of (inactive RCs). Broadly, both active and inactive RCLs expressed a similarly high level of insufficiency of all types of resources, as reflected in Figure 25.



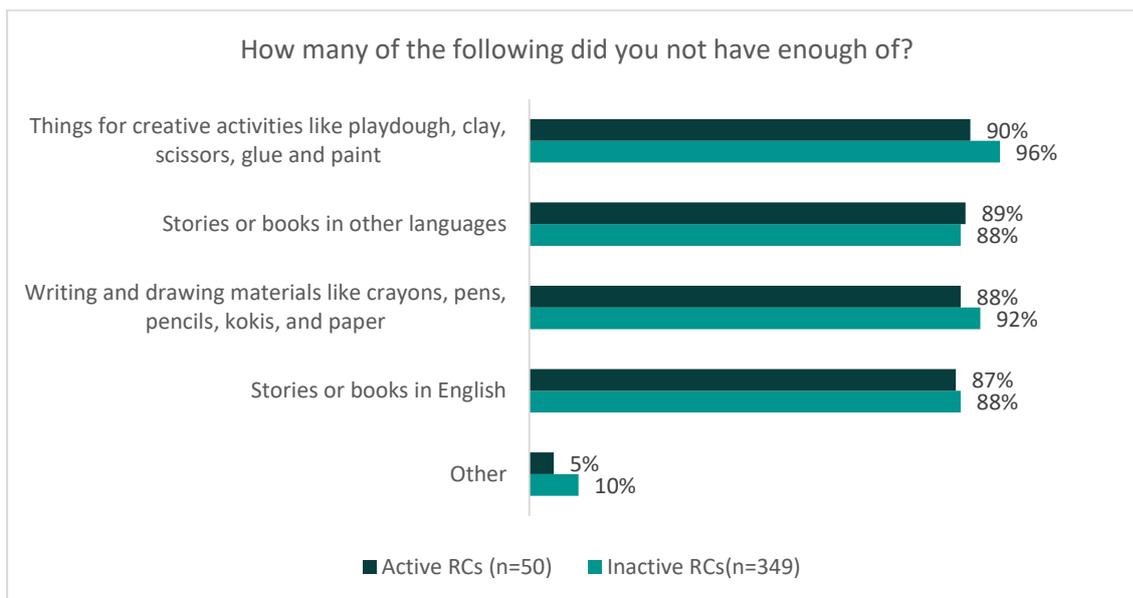


Figure 25: Overview of resources RCs do/did not have enough of³⁴

For active RCs, the variations by project are insignificant, with reports about shortages of stories or books in other languages being lowest in special projects RCs, probably because Nal’ibali has supplied these RCs with books in the languages spoken. Things mentioned in the other category are posters, paint brushes, colouring books, puzzles and paint brushes.

4.2.8 Key insights

- 74% of all RCs have at least two core reading materials. Disaggregated by project, 84% of special project, 75% of core campaign and 47% of online registration clubs meet the quality threshold.
- The evaluation of reading resources by whether RCs have at least two resources masks the small quantities of the resources in the clubs – more than 25% of each type of club has 10 or fewer of each type of resource.
- 37% of the clubs do not have supplements, an important bilingual resource in RCs where only 13% of the RCs have reading materials in the languages used in the clubs. Bilingual dictionaries and supplements can be used to support this lack of materials in children’s home languages.
- More than 45% of special projects RCs indicated they have isiXhosa or isiZulu reading materials, and the dedicated focus to develop reading materials in these languages has also benefitted other clubs.
- Nal’ibali and libraries are the biggest sources of reading resources, and RCL agency is high in sourcing additional materials for the clubs. Schools are also major sources of reading resources, especially where there is a well-stocked library. This was

³⁴ The question “Which of the following do you NOT have enough of?” was a multiple options response question.



- observed at site visits to schools with library resources that were too many to count
- 72% of all RCs refresh their own or library books at least twice a year.

4.3 Practice in RCs

To determine the quality of RCs, the evaluation posed the question: **What are the characteristics, conditions and practice that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs?** The focus here was on exploring what is happening in RCs, how adults scaffold children's literacy development and learning, how progress is tracked and measured, how Nal'ibali supports established RCs, and the extent to which the practice in RCs is aligned with what is promoted by Nal'ibali in training and Nal'ibali resources. The main analysis uses survey data which is augmented by site visit data.

Guidelines for the activities that should take place in reading clubs are provided in the *Module 3 Run a Reading Club Participants Notes* (Nal'ibali, n.d.c), the *Story Power Guide to Reading Clubs* (Nal'ibali, n.d.f), the *Story Powered School Workshop on Implementing Reading for Enjoyment in Schools Participant Notes* (Nal'ibali, 2018b), the *Reading Club Workshop Facilitator's Guide for Department of Basic Education (DBE) Training* (Nal'ibali, n.d.g), Nal'ibali pamphlets, and the *Nal'ibali RC ToC* (Nal'ibali, 2019), among others. The activities specified in these documents include storytelling, reading aloud, songs and games, acting out, discussing stories that have been read, writing, and drawing. However, the parameters of each activity and the prioritisation of activities is not discussed in these multiple resources, and this is now a major shortcoming given the ex post facto development of the quality framework. Nal'ibali has offered RCs flexibility in the running of the RCs but concerns with quality will require explicit articulation of what quality looks like, so that it can be aspirational and be used by RCLs to assess themselves.

For the quality framework, a distinction is made between essential practice and supporting practice in RCs. Essential practice comprises three priority dimensions that should ideally take place mostly or always at the RC, that is, adults reading aloud to children; children's independent engagement with text, i.e. children reading in different forms; and the use of the children's home languages. These aspects of practice, according to Nal'ibali, are the things that enable children to enjoy reading.

Broadly, the thresholds for essential practice are well met by the RCs to varying degrees:

- 83% of all RCs meet the threshold for reading aloud to children.
- 87% meet the threshold for using the children's home languages.
- 63% of all clubs meet the threshold for children's independent engagement with text.

The relatively lower percentage of RCs that meet the threshold for children independently engaging with text is anomalous. Thus the analysis looked at several factors that could influence the extent of children's engagement with text, that is, the quantities of reading resources available, whether the RCLs plan for sessions or not, and the duration of RC meetings.



Regarding availability of resources, only two clubs (1%) indicated that they did not have any of the core resources as shown in table 18. That two RCs only did not have any of the core resources suggests that a large number of RCs could have done group reading since they had two or three types of resources. The two RCs with none of the core resources had 20 and 11 children respectively and the RCL of the club with 11 children indicated that they have 1-10 story cards, read aloud collections and newspapers, while the one with 20 children has 21-30 story cards and read aloud collections. This suggests that these clubs could also have done any of the independent engagement with text activities using these resources.

Table 18: Overview of availability of core resource types at RCs

# of core resource types	# of clubs with these
All three core resources	100 (29%)
Two core resources	160 (46%)
One core resource	87(25%)
No core resources	2 (1%)
Total	100%

Ninety nine percent of the RCs had at least one type of core resource and could consequently do at least group reading, yet only 26% of the clubs let children engage in group reading as reflected in figure 26.

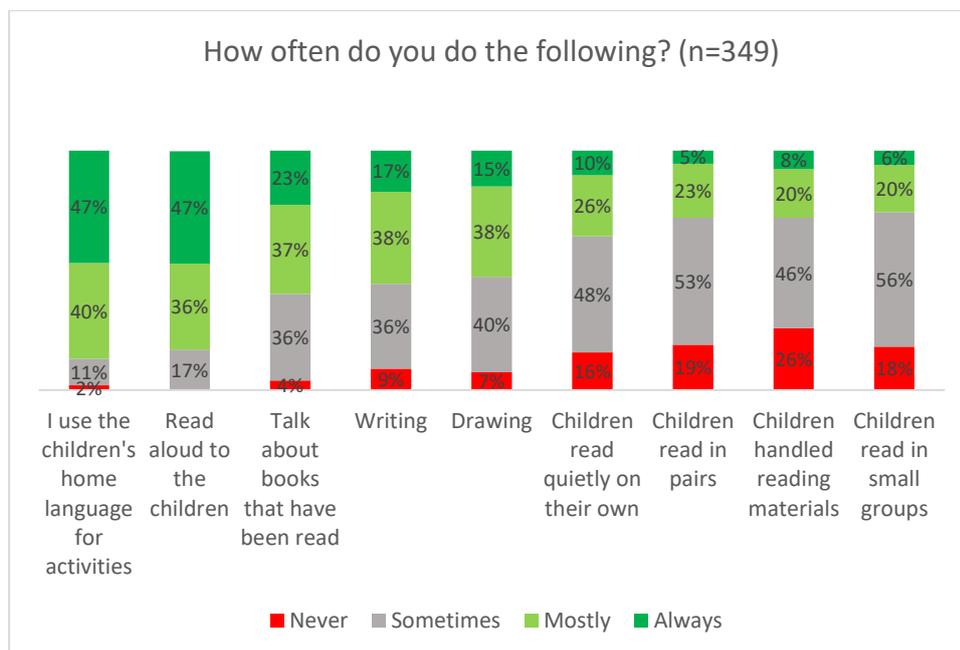


Figure 26: Assessing frequency of core and supporting activities in clubs

In terms of planning, 91% of the RCLs indicated that they plan for RC meetings, so clearly, they are not planning for children’s independent engagement with text.



Considering duration of meetings, there is no marked difference in children’s engagement with text for clubs that meet for less than 30 minutes and those that meet for longer than 2 hours as reflected in table 18.

Table 19: Assessing children’s engagement with text by RC meeting duration

Practice	% clubs meeting duration implementing practice mostly and always					
	Less than 30 minutes	30 to 45 minutes	45 minutes to an hour	1 to 1.5 hours	1.5 to 2 hours	Longer than 2 hours
Children read quietly on their own	6(2%)	33(9%)	29(8%)	24(7%)	18(5%)	15(4%)
Children read in pairs	8(2%)	28(8%)	22(6%)	19(5%)	11(3%)	10(3%)
Children read in small groups	8(2%)	30(9%)	21(6%)	14(4%)	9(3%)	8(2%)
Children handled reading materials	7(2%)	35 (10%)	26(7%)	13(4%)	12(3%)	5(1%)

Based on this data, it would appear that the biggest impediment to children’s independent engagement with text in RCs is poor knowledge by RCLs about the significance of this for the RFE campaign.

Supporting practice comprises planning for RC meetings and activities that are supposed to create a relaxed atmosphere for children in which to enjoy their reading. The thresholds for the different dimensions of supporting practice are: children use their own writing or drawing mostly and always, children talk about books that have been read; and children are allowed to take books home mostly or always.

Regarding supporting practice:

- 60% of all RCs meet the threshold for talking about books, and the proportion is higher for special projects RCs (70%) compared to core campaign RCs (57%) and online registration RCs (53%). However, site visit data does not corroborate this finding as RCLs and children in different types of clubs all spoke about books that had been read in their RCs.
- Only 41% of the clubs meet the threshold for allowing children to take books home, with a very low proportion of core campaign RCs (32%) meeting the threshold compared to low proportions for online registration (47%) and special projects (56%) clubs. Viewed in light of the discussion about quantities of reading resources, it is plausible that RCLs are not enthusiastic about letting children take books home as they wish to preserve the limited quantities and assume that children will lose books if they are removed from the RC.
- The highest percentage of RCs - 91% of all clubs - meet the threshold for planning for RC meetings.

Regarding taking books home, 41% of the RCLs indicated that they lend children books to take home. Of these, 82% lend own books and 58% lend children supplements³⁵. Table 19 shows that RC with more than 21 supplements and those with more than 30 own books were more likely to let children

³⁵ This was a multiple options response question.



take reading resources home. This suggests that if RCs have more resources, they are most likely to lend these to children.

Table 20: Comparing quantities of supplements and own books against lending practice

Quantity	Supplements		Own books	
	Take home	Do not take home	Take home	Do not take home
1-10	27(28%)	71(72%)	36(27%)	95(73%)
11-20	16(39%)	25(61%)	18(34%)	35(66%)
21-30	12(80%)	3(20%)	11(37%)	19(63%)
31-50	16(70%)	7(30%)	16(59%)	11(41%)
51-100	14(64%)	8(36%)	17(57%)	13(43%)
More than 100	15(71%)	6(29%)	10(59%)	7(41%)

The rate of return for reading resources taken home is very high among active RCs, for all types of resources, and while 55% of RCLs indicated children returned the supplement, this is also the resource that children are most likely to keep at home - 23% of the clubs indicated the children keep the supplement. This is positive for building the stock of reading resources in homes and communities that children can use. Having reading resources at home also supports the role of literacy role models that some children are taking on when reading to their parents. Figure 27 highlights what is happening to different types of reading materials when they are taken home from the RC, as reported in the survey.

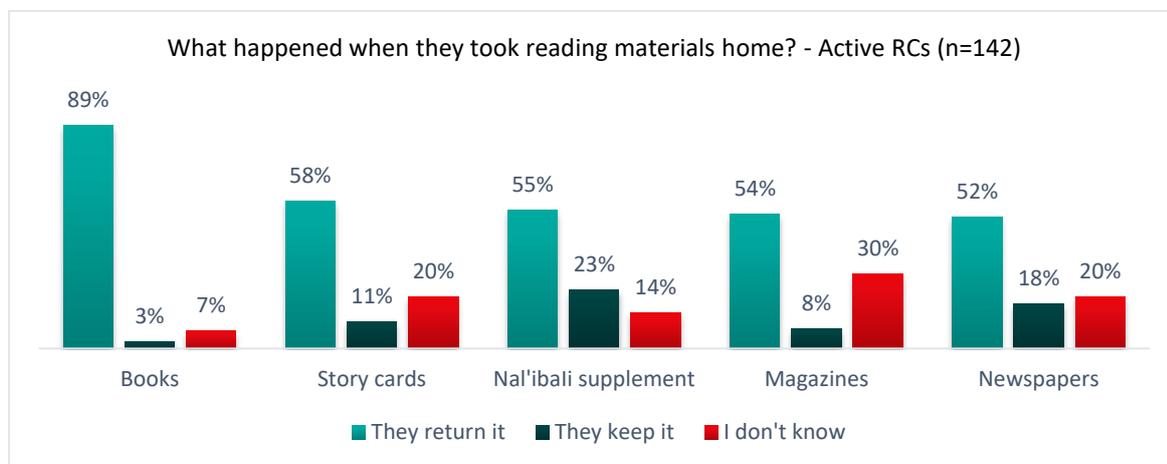


Figure 27: Exploring what happens to reading resources checked out from active³⁶ RCs

Overall, there is a high rate of return of books, with 89% of RCLs who answered this question indicating that children return the books. This is a critical finding as it allays any fears that some RCLs may have about losing books if children take them home. All other reading resources are also returned in more than 50% of the clubs. This data is useful in promoting wider lending of reading materials.

³⁶ This was a multiple options response.



That less than half of RCs are lending books to children to take home is a departure from what Nal’ibali promotes. The strong evidence of children who return books that have been borrowed should be used to promote better resource lending to children.

4.3.1 Measuring children’s progress

RCLs were asked if they measured children’s progress in the activities they do in the RCs, and 73% of active RCLs, most of them primary school teachers and other school based practitioners, responded in the affirmative. Of the 273 qualitative codes from the responses, the most prevalent method of assessment was tests, assessments and homework assignments, as shown in Table 20.

Table 21: Measuring children’s progress in active RCs

How children’s progress is measured in RCs	Frequency
Tests, assessments and homework assignments	93
Discussions, presentations, games, competitions, one on one sessions	73
Observation of children	71
Rubric, observation form, progress report used to track children’s reading skills development	19
Children’s school marks tracked to measure improvement or areas of difficulty	17
Total	273

Nal’ibali does not promote assessment of children, and while observations to evaluate progress can be a discrete strategy to evaluate improvement in children’s reading, assessments like tests can make children anxious and equates to the scholarisation of RCs, which may take the fun out of participating in them. Using schoolwork as a measure of progress at a reading club is also too tenuous as it is difficult to attribute the success of one to the other. Considering that this assessment is mainly taking place in school based RCs, this could be highlighting how difficult it is to change entrenched behaviour. Some non-intrusive measures like children’s level of participation in RC activities, attendance at sessions, and confidence in reading aloud could be used to assess the effects of the RC without letting children know that they are being evaluated.

4.3.2 Nal’ibali support in running RCs

Having established the practices in RCs, this sub-section answers the question: **What does engagement with Nal’ibali look like for established RCs?** As highlighted earlier in the report, Nal’ibali provides differentiated support to RCs by project. As to be expected, based on Nal’ibali’s own description of the support they provide to the projects, online registration RCs are the least supported in the provision of reading materials, training, and visits from Nal’ibali staff members. Table 21 highlights the types of support or lack of support, as reported by RCLs by project.

Table 22: Overview of Nal’ibali support by project³⁷ - active RCs

³⁷ Multiple options response.



Type of Nal'ibali support	Core campaign (n=226)	Special projects (n=89)	Online registration (n=34)
It hasn't supported me	33 (15%)	7 (8%)	9 (26%)
Providing reading materials	143 (63%)	75 (84%)	10 (29%)
Training me and/or other adults who help	137 (61%)	50 (56%)	14 (41%)
Phoning us	77 (34%)	27 (30%)	11 (32%)
Sending SMSs and/or e-mails about events and celebrations	81 (36%)	32 (36%)	13 (38%)
We use the Nal'ibali website for stories to read	38 (17%)	23 (26%)	12 (35%)
We use the Nal'ibali website for activities and ideas	26 (12%)	15 (17%)	10 (29%)
Visits from Nal'ibali staff members	100 (44%)	72 (81%)	6 (18%)
Other ³⁸	13 (6%)	15 (17%)	2 (6%)

Special projects RCs generally receive the most support, with core campaign RCs following closely. The provision of reading materials was reported by 63% of RCLs in the core campaign and 84% of RCLs in special projects. Only 29% of online registration RCLs indicated that they receive materials from Nal'ibali. Online registration clubs receive the most support from Nal'ibali through phone calls and short message service (SMS) communication.

Active RCLs were asked what they would like Nal'ibali to do to support their RCs, and the analysis of the qualitative data to this question yielded 461 codes. The support needs with a frequency of 10 or more (451 codes) are captured in Table 22.

Table 23: Support required from Nal'ibali by active RCs

Support required	Frequency
Provision of stationery and t-shirts	174 (39%)
Provision of enough and appropriate reading materials	100 (22%)
Varied support ³⁹	51 (11%)
Provision of training to RCL and volunteers	50 (11%)
Provision of food and snacks	40 (9%)
Funding	13 (3%)
Conducive environment	12 (3%)
Space to run the RC	11 (2%)

The support mentioned by most RCLs is provision of stationery and t-shirts, followed by reading materials and training. Based on current practice, stationery is outside of the scope of what Nal'ibali can provide but could be sourced through partnerships or provided to a limited extent to promote

³⁸ RCLs reported receiving the following from Nal'ibali: newspapers, pamphlets, calendars, posters, T-shirts, hanging/mobile libraries, caps, memory stick (USB) and small speaker, finance (money to support the club; R300.00 for the children's snacks, R50.00 voucher for food), community training, teachers' guides, knowledge on how to run a club, visits to the club.

³⁹ Several things were mentioned here including skills on how to handle children, visits from Nal'ibali, educational toys, volunteers to assist, activities to do in the RC, more competitions.



the RCs’ own sourcing of these resources. RCLs also mentioned that they would like t-shirts, reading materials and training, which can be provided by Nal’ibali.

4.3.3 Key insights

- In RC practice, there is closer alignment with what Nal’ibali promotes for adults reading aloud, use of home languages at the club and planning for meetings, as this practice is implemented by more than 80% of the RCs.
- However, there is lesser uptake of the practice to talk about books, lending books, and independent engagement with text. The low uptake of lending books and independent engagement with text by children could be hampered by the limited reading resources in the RC.
- Most RCs, based on their size, need at least 10 of three core resources to enable children to read quietly.
- The rate of return of books borrowed by children is very high. Books are returned in 89% of the RCs where books go home and this should encourage RCLs to lend books more.

4.4 Quality of RCs

To answer the question: **What are the characteristics, conditions, and practices that determine and differentiate the quality of reading clubs**, the methodology outlined in section 3.6.1 was employed to determine the quality of RCs. The findings on quality are discussed in this section in relation to the focus areas of membership, dosage, access to resources and practice. The presentation of results focuses on extrapolating the predictors of good and excellent clubs.

Considering the scores for the dimensions of membership, dosage, access to resources and practice, there are no weak clubs, and most of the clubs (42%) classify as good clubs. The classification of clubs by quality is presented in Table 23.

Table 24: Quality of active RCs

Quality of RCs	# RCs
Weak club	0
Struggling Club	25 (7%)
Developing Club	95 (27%)
Good Club	148 (42%)
Excellent Club	81 (23%)
Total	349 (100%)

Considering quality by type of club, special projects had the highest proportion of good and excellent clubs and the least number of struggling clubs but almost the same proportion of developing clubs as core campaign clubs. Core campaign clubs have the second highest proportion of good and excellent



clubs (65%) and online registration clubs have 50%. The highest proportion of struggling and developing clubs is among the online registration clubs with half of the clubs falling within these quality bands compared to 35% of core campaign RCs and 27% special projects RCs. Table 24 maps the quality of clubs by type of project.

Table 25: RC quality by type of project

	Core campaign (n=226)	Special projects (n=89)	Online (n=34)	All
Quality of RCs	# RCs	# RCs	# RCs	# RCs
Weak Club	0	0	0	0
Struggling Club	19(8%)	3(3%)	3(9%)	25(7%)
Developing Club	60(27%)	21(24%)	14(41%)	95(27%)
Good Club	98(43%)	39(43%)	11(32%)	148(42%)
Excellent Club	49(22%)	26(29%)	6(18%)	81(23%)
Total	226(100%)	89(100%)	34(100%)	349 (100%)

A T-test was run on the quality score for special projects and online registration RCs whose p-value = 0.0141 < 0.05. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the average quality scores between special projects RCs and online registration RCs at a 5% significance level. However, the difference in quality between core campaign and online registration RCs is not that significant, at a 5% significance level, as the p-value = 0.0987 > 0.05. There is also no significant difference at a 5% level of significance between the quality score for special projects and core campaign RCs as the p-value = 0.1173 > 0.05.

Figure 28 presents a visual mapping of good and excellent clubs and the extent to which they met the threshold in the dimensions for the five focus areas that determine quality. Clubs that do not meet the threshold are labelled as good 0 or excellent 0, and those that meet the threshold are labelled good 1 or excellent 1. The figure suggests that:

- For the adult:child ratio dimension, meeting the threshold for the ideal is a stronger predictor of excellent clubs than it is of good clubs. The difference in the proportion of good clubs that meet the threshold compared to those that do not is slight at only 2%, whereas there is a significantly greater proportion of excellent clubs that meet the threshold compared to those that do not - 32% more excellent clubs meet the threshold.
- For the dosage dimensions, meeting the threshold for frequency and duration of meetings is a strong predictor of excellent clubs. The difference in the proportion between excellent clubs that meet the threshold for meeting frequency is 13% while that for excellent clubs that meet the threshold for duration of meetings compared to those that do not is 19%. For both dimensions, there are more good clubs that do not meet the threshold than those that meet it.





Figure 28: Quality by all dimensions – all good and excellent clubs

- The differences in the proportion of good clubs that meet the threshold compared to those that do not is larger for two dimensions in the access to resources focus area. Twenty two percent more good clubs meet the threshold for having at least two core resources and 27% more meet the threshold for refreshing non-NB resources at least twice a year. The differences in the proportion of good clubs that meet the threshold for having at least one type of writing material and one type of paper is relatively smaller at 8%.
- The differences in the proportion of excellent clubs that meet all dimensions for access to resources is large, making all dimensions very strong predictors of excellent clubs. Only clubs that meet the threshold for refreshment of resources and having other literacy development resources are excellent clubs, and for the core reading resources dimension, 30% more excellent clubs meet the threshold – only 1% of clubs that do not meet the threshold are excellent clubs.
- For the practice focus area, only one of the seven dimensions - meeting the threshold for use of children’s home languages is a strong predictor of good clubs (13% more clubs that meet this threshold are good clubs).



- For excellent clubs, six of the seven dimensions are strong predictors of excellence as the difference between clubs that meet the threshold for the dimensions and those that do not ranges from 10% for children’s independent engagement with text to 22% for adults reading aloud.

Disaggregated by project, there are variations in the degree to which meeting the threshold predicts good or excellent clubs. The stronger predictors, where there is a 10% or more variance between good and excellent clubs that meet the threshold for each dimension are highlighted green in table 25⁴⁰. The empty grey blocks signal dimensions where there were more or no clubs not meeting the dimension that were good or excellent.

Table 26: Differences in proportion of clubs that meet the dimension thresholds

Quality dimension	Proportion where more good clubs are meeting threshold			Proportion where more excellent clubs are meeting threshold		
	Core campaign	Special projects	Online registration	Core campaign	Special projects	Online registration
Adult: child ratio		4%	19%	32%	38%	18%
Meeting frequency		⁴¹ *44%	*34%	*22%	*30%	
Duration of meetings				18%	25%	*24%
Reading materials	25%	27%		26%	*35%	*38%
Other literacy development materials	13%		8%	*33%	*42%	*26%
Refreshment of resources	34%	3%	34%	*30%	*40%	*26%
Adults reading aloud	9%			20%	27%	*21%
Children's independent engagement with text	9%		31%	9%	12%	6%
Use of children's home languages	18%		25%		*32%	
Children's interpretive actions		10%	14%	20%	10%	9%
Talking about books that have been read			14%	18%	10%	
Taking materials home	1%	13%		17%		14%
Planning for RC meetings	6%	7%	14%	18%	17%	*21%

Judging by the grey and white blocks, there is work required to varying degrees to ensure that practice improves across all quality dimensions to propel the good clubs to excellence and to increase the proportion of good and excellent clubs.

The analysis also considered the effects of training on quality, and it seems training is a strong predictor of quality. Except for the online registration clubs which are a deviant,⁴² over 60% of the

⁴⁰ The visual mapping of quality by dimension by projects is presented as an appendix to the report.

⁴¹ All values with an * signal that there were no clubs that do not meet the threshold in that dimension and the value presented is for all clubs that meet the threshold.

⁴² The number of trained RCLs is very small and hence the results may not be meaningful. Most online registration RCLs are not trained as they register clubs online and not after training as most core campaign and special projects RCs do.



clubs where RCLs indicated they had received Nal'ibali training are good to excellent clubs, as shown in Figure 29.

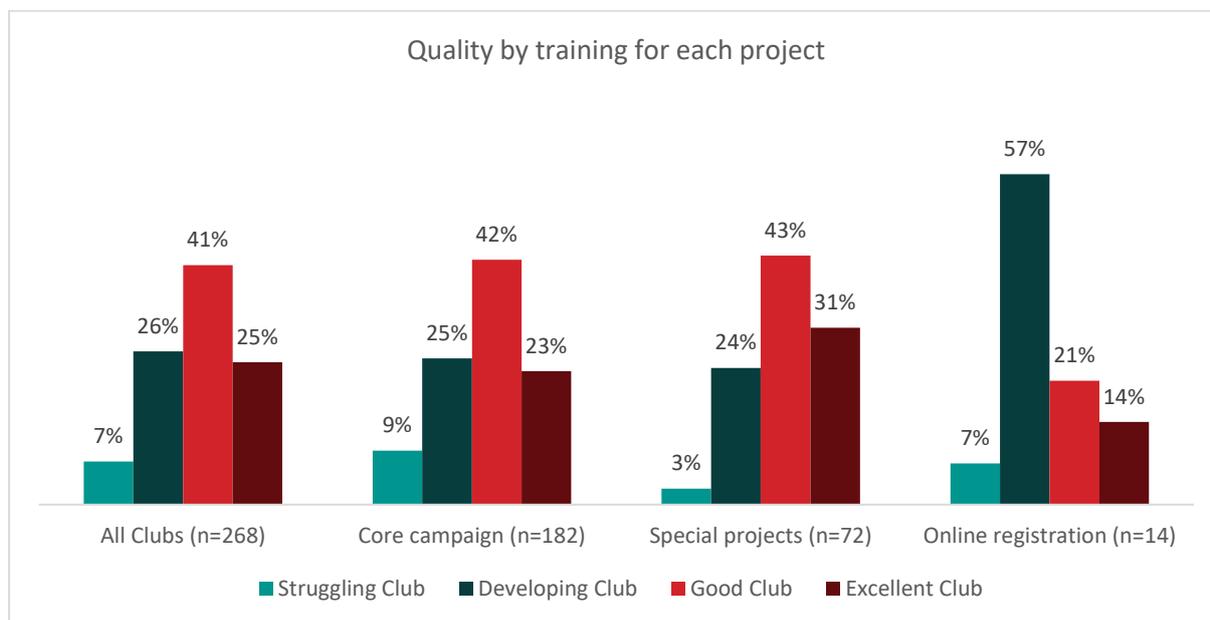


Figure 29: Quality of clubs by training

4.4.1 Key insights

- Overall, considering the full sample, there are more clubs that are good and excellent than struggling and developing.
- Access to resources is a strong predictor of quality.
- All dimensions of practice are good predictors of quality except for the dimension talking about books where there is a relatively small proportion of clubs that do not meet the threshold that classify as good clubs.
- Training is a strong predictor of quality as there are more clubs that are good and excellent among the clubs that have received training.

4.5 Sustainability of RCs

To answer the question: **What are the factors, characteristics, conditions and practices that support or inhibit reading club longevity and sustainability?** data from surveys and site visits as well as telephonic interviews was used. The intention was to explore for how long RCs stay running before they close, factors that contributed to RCs becoming inactive, critical success factors for sustainable RCs, strategies to enable RCs to stay active, and what could be done to revive inactive RCs.



4.5.1 Longevity of RCs

Nal'ibali has been collecting data annually since 2012 which can indicate the length of time clubs have been in existence. There is an annual drive to contact every club that registered or re-registered the previous year to find out if they are still active. Nal'ibali has come up with the phrase 'RC half-life' to describe how *"the percentage of active RCs falls sharply (by half to two-thirds) one year after registration and continues to decline each year thereafter"* (Nal'ibali, 2019: 52). Although based on a small sample of 50 inactive RCs, the survey data corroborates the RC half-life analogy. Figure 30 shows how long it took for RCs to become inactive.

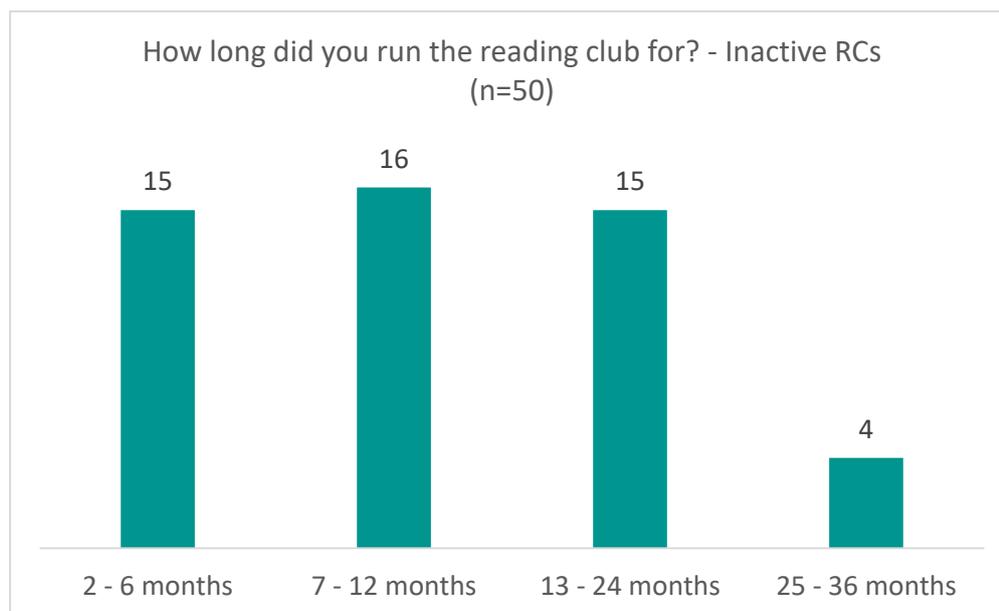


Figure 30: Time to inactivity – inactive RCs

More than two thirds of the RCs had become inactive after a year, and another 30% in the following year. There was a 50% attrition of RCs in 2018 (RCs that did not re-register from 2017) and 42% in 2019 (clubs from 2018 that did not re-register in 2019). New clubs join each year and become inactive within a year. More core campaign RCs seem to run the longest – of the 15(30%) RCs that reported running for 13-24 months, eight(53%) were core campaign, three(20%) special projects,⁴³ and four(27%) online registration. Core campaign RCs were the only ones running after 25 months (four clubs). The finding that core campaign clubs are the longest running articulates well with the Nal'ibali monitoring data.

RCLs were asked in the survey and during telephonic interviews why they had stopped running the RC. Analysis of the data generated 56 qualitative codes comprising 13 different reasons that were grouped according to routine turnover, lack of support and contextual issues. The data seems to suggest that reading club inactivity is inevitable as most of the factors appear to be normal reasons.

⁴³ This could also be because the Lesedi and Letsatsi projects only launched in 2018 and registered mid-year, so had not had an opportunity to run for 13-24 months yet, and because SPS cohorts 2 (2018) and 3 (2019) also had not all had a long time to run at time of survey.



Seventy percent of the codes were related to normal attrition, and 44% of these signalled lack of time as a key reason for discontinuing the activities of a RC. Reasons cited by RCLs attributed to routine turnover are:

- Found a new job and no longer had time;
- Workload had increased at work;
- Found it too much work running the RC alone after the volunteer who had been assisting left;
- Started a learnership;
- Left the school or organisation they were working for;
- Relocated; or
- Had to prepare for exams.

Contextual factors constitute 11% of the reasons why the club had become inactive, and these include:

- Lack of a venue – the RCL had a nomadic RC and indicated “*we have been moving from one place to another*” since the RC started.
- Distance to the RC was too far.
- The RCL did not have money for transport to get to the RC.
- Contract of employment ended – RCL was employed by an organisation that enabled them to run a RC.
- Funding ran out – this was a reading coach funded programme whose funding had run up.
- Volunteers expected a stipend and when they did not get it, they stopped running the RC.
- Children stopped coming because they had progressed to high school and moved away from the area.

Factors to do with lack of support account for 20% of the reasons for inactivity, and these include:

- RCL did not have further information about running a RC.
- The school was understaffed and there was no volunteer to support the RC.
- After Nal’ibali’s withdrawal at the end of the project, the RC stopped running.
- RC did not have enough reading materials.
- There was no support for running the RC.

A concerning finding is the seeming inability of RCLs in schools to sustain themselves after SSs have left. A RCL pointed out that the club became inactive after the SS left, and there was no one to continue with the club, adding that the club could be revived if the SS came back to run it. On the other hand, an interviewed SS believed that the teachers could not run a club as they focus on the curriculum and the clubs can only be run by SSs. The RCL who used to be a SS at an SPS school said:

It was sad and unfortunate that our contracts ended, the clubs suffered because even though Nal’ibali still delivers reading materials, the teachers are bombarded with the curriculum and do not have time to continue with the clubs. The time that we had or ran the clubs was too



little, even now when the kids see me, they ask about when we are coming back. We cannot even answer them but we see that they really miss it and some of the teachers also want us to come back because we were really helping the kids to improve in the normal classroom.
(Inactive RCL Interview)

The issue here is whether SSs can embed the RFE approach strongly enough in schools in the few months they work with teachers. If SS's do not manage to embed the approach, the sustainability of RCs is threatened and this could perhaps explain why the highest attrition of RCs within the first year is among special projects RCs (77%) compared to 59% core campaign and 50% online registration RCs.

The interviews with inactive RCLs corroborated the survey data and shed more light on the intricacy of factors leading to inactivity by showing that it was not always a single factor but sometimes a combination of factors that was responsible. The following quotations refer:

The kids who used to attend the club moved from the primary close by to different secondary schools that are a bit far from here so that led to us closing. We finished reading most of the books, so the kids lost interest and stopped coming. Because the books had been sourced for the children when they were younger, many became uninterested as they grew older. Some kids now wanted novels and there were none. Also, the space issue,⁴⁴ due to being cramped up and having limited space, kids couldn't be free to express themselves as much as they wanted to. (Interview with inactive RCL)

The RC became inactive because I got a new job and no longer had time. I ran the RC as a student, and after completing my university studies I moved on. Further, the children I started with were towards the end of primary school and as they progressed, they moved to different high schools and some were far from the venue, so the club started running out of children.
(Inactive RCL interview)

For the RCL of inactive RC4, the factors leading to inactivity were routine turnover – natural progression of children, lack of support and lack of age appropriate resources– and environmental – lack of a suitable space for running the RC when it was raining. For inactive RC5, the factors were routine but related to children as well as the RCL – RCL's employment which led to limited time and children's progression. This is an important finding which suggests that possible solutions to prevent clubs from becoming inactive need to be multi-pronged as single solutions may not be adequate for addressing the challenges that lead to inactivity. For example, if Nal'ibali were to address the 20% support-related challenges highlighted by this sample, there would be no guarantee that contextual and normal factors would not lead to inactivity.

RCLs of inactive RCs were asked if they would be interested in reviving their clubs: 66% of the RCLs answered in the affirmative and 34% said they would not be interested. Of the 42 codes generated

⁴⁴ The RC was run outside the RCL's home but moved indoors when it rained, and this is when there were spatial constraints.



specifying what would be needed to revive inactive RCs, only three codes had any meaningful frequencies: 29% were about the need for diverse reading materials, 17% were about support from Nal'ibali (unspecified), and 10% were about getting a stipend from Nal'ibali. The other aspects mentioned were finding a suitable space to run the RC, enrolling children, getting volunteers and getting a permanent work contract from Nal'ibali.

4.5.2 Promoting sustainability

The sustainability measures employed by Nal'ibali mainly include training of the Big 5⁴⁵ in the SPS RCs and training a large pool of volunteers and RCLs to understand how to run a RC, as well as providing the various forms of support to varying degrees in the different projects. The issue of sustainability was addressed in the survey as well as during site visit events. Active RCLs were asked to identify three things that would enable their RCs to be sustainable and what Nal'ibali could do to help keep the clubs running. Regarding aspects that would promote RC sustainability, the most cited were provision of support from Nal'ibali, the community and volunteers (193 qualitative codes), provision of enough and appropriate reading materials (190 codes) and provision of stationery and t-shirts (188 codes). All the aspects of a high frequency (20 or more codes) that were mentioned as enablers of sustainability are presented in Table 26.

Table 27: Enablers of sustainability reported by active RCLs

Enablers of sustainability	Frequency count
Provision of support from Nal'ibali, parents, community, volunteers	193
Provision of enough and appropriate reading materials	190
Provision of stationary, uniform, t-shirts	188
Food and snacks	59
Provision of training to volunteers and RCLs	57
Availability of space for Nal'ibali reading club meetings	46
Having members who join and stay at the clubs	33
Conducive space for RC meetings	31
Provision of funding to the RC	29
Diverse activities at reading clubs include competitions	24
Provision of electronic devices (computer/laptop, printer, data, TV, radio, videos)	21
Access to a library	20
Total codes	891

Specifically, the support from Nal'ibali most mentioned was visits from Nal'ibali staff members, a cost effective strategy, with facilitating opportunities for collaboration with other RCLs (a cost effective strategy) and extension of contract being mentioned by very few people. Other RCLs who mentioned support from Nal'ibali did not specify the support required. The support from community and parents mentioned includes having regular meetings with parents, effective communication between the RCL and parents, getting books from parents, getting more teachers involved, and getting

⁴⁵ In 2017, Nal'ibali trained three educators and two community leaders as part of the Big 5, but in 2018 they shifted and trained five educators when they realised that a critical mass of trained educators was required.



parental involvement in the clubs. Support from volunteers includes having qualified volunteers who know what to do to help and getting more volunteers to help.

Most of the enablers in Table 26 can be addressed by Nal'ibali, either through direct inputs, for example, provision of reading materials, t-shirts and training, or through facilitation, for example, access to a library. There are, however, some enablers that are outside the scope of Nal'ibali's focus; these include the provision of electronic devices, of funding, of conducive spaces and of food and snacks.

The enablers of sustainability cited in the site visit interviews and FG discussions to a great extent articulate with those that emerged from the survey. These include things that Nal'ibali can provide or facilitate, for instance: children who attend and are committed to the club; trained RCLs and volunteers; support from school leadership and teachers for school-based RCs; parental support; adequate reading resources; funding for other literacy development activities; and more volunteers willing to help, as well as what Nal'ibali cannot give, for example, space and funding.

Some poignant insights were shared in the qualitative research about leadership, working together as multiple schools in communities, training, running of RCs, and mainstreaming the Nal'ibali approach, all of which have strategic implications for Nal'ibali. Regarding leadership, Ss supporting different schools indicated that if a principal supported the RCs, this would motivate the teachers in the schools. One SS indicated: *"The leader must have passion and those who are being led will follow the footsteps"* (SPS1SSI) and another emphasised:

If the principal is active and involved even teachers get involved and they become active ...you always need the principals buy in so that the teachers don't take the backseat. (Interview with SS)

This perception is strengthened by the following quote which highlights one principal's negative thoughts about the Nal'ibali programme that led to the SS's belief that the SPS RCs are not sustainable without strong leadership and monitoring from Nal'ibali:

Yes, you know people they don't enjoy volunteering for a long time or a while, they always complaining about not getting a stipend. Some also highlight the fact that they also don't have the capacity to motivate kids to come. One principal once even asked me where I was and when I told them I am now working at another school, and that we had trained them to continue with the reading club without Ss, he told me that they can't be doing someone else's work/project. I think we need to monitor these clubs to make sure that there is continuity. (Interview with SS)

In terms of working together as multiple schools within a community, some volunteers proposed that to keep clubs running for a long time, it would be useful to involve more schools and children around the community. This would also entail introducing visits to other clubs, schools and libraries and creating competitions so that children do not get bored with the same activities. Another advantage to this suggestion is that children would be exposed to the array of RCs in their community and



would therefore have choices if they wanted to join another RC which meets on a different day of the week, or they would have another club to join if their club ever became inactive. RCLs would showcase their practice and share ideas and strive for excellence as their practice and clubs would be open to scrutiny from others.

Considering mainstreaming the Nal'ibali approach, a SS indicated that the fact that the approach works should be leveraged to improve learning outcomes more broadly:

Running the clubs in our communities and school, that's what makes our reading culture to grow. It would be nice to use some of the elements we use here with Nal'ibali and adopt them to classroom set up to help improve children's marks as well in school and class. Nal'ibali should also take it upon themselves to make sure that this program does not die a silent death because this is amazing we need to make sure our black kids are reading with meaning and understanding that is why we have some of the shocking results in the country when it comes to matric results because the seed was not planted at an early age. (Interview with SS)

This strategy requires strong leadership and support from teachers. It also requires “ongoing training and motivation from others” (Volunteer Focus Group, RC14VFG). As RCLs are exposed to other RCLs and their practice, some space would be needed for showcasing best practice and enabling critical engagement in order to push the limits of what the RCLs know: ongoing training could be one of those spaces.

In relation to models of running a RC, one RCL explained how she is thinking of sustainability in her running of the RC by collaborating with other colleagues within the school in the running of the club. She explained that:

Some of the activities are run by me and others by the library assistant and volunteer as I am trying to ensure continuity of the RC beyond myself, so I am trying to share responsibility of activities. (Interview with RCL)

By employing this strategy, the RCL is attempting to ensure that the club will not become inactive when she leaves because there are others who understand the principles and practicalities of the RFE approach and can continue to run the club.

What is important about all these suggestions is that they shift the focus of sustainability from RCs and tease the idea of sustainability of the Nal'ibali approach, which seems to be a more viable sustainability measure as the approach should outlast a defunct RC. Further, given that RCs are located in communities and the idea is to get as many RCs as possible running, collaboration between RCs, with all its risks, particularly if the people collaborating are not driven, has the potential to sustain itself at no cost. If RCLs from long running RCs are linked up with new RCs, or RCLs from good and excellent clubs are linked up with those from struggling and developing clubs, they can support and motivate each other to improve quality and sustainability of RCs. Further, linking up RCLs can expose children to RCs within their communities and enable them to choose clubs



that are near them or where there are more books. Within a collaborative context of buddies, RCLs can exchange books to increase diversity and quantities of books in their clubs.

Collaboration seems to exist already, but would need to be catalysed into more meaningful action. The collaboration that is currently underway can be a useful starting point of the 130 (37%) RCLs who indicated they know other RCLs, only 47% reported that there are activities where there is collaboration among RCLs. The collaboration seems to be taking place mostly within schools, with very limited collaboration between schools, the only ones mentioned being the SPS exhibition and competitions between SPS RCs. RCLs shed some light on collaborative activities within their schools and some of the challenges of collaboration:

We have three reading clubs at our school. The three of us hold weekly meetings, reflect and plan together. We attend quarterly training sessions with reading club leaders from other schools and we participate in competitions with other reading clubs in the district. (Interview with RCL)

We hold reflection meetings with other reading club leaders in our school to update one another and advise where one is experiencing challenges. We also prepare jointly for competitions our school attends with other schools in our district. (Interview with RCL)

We hold reflection meetings with the other reading club leader within the school. I do the same in other schools. Meeting with other schools is not easy as they are not in proximity with one another... (Interview with SS)

Although other RCLs from core campaign projects indicated that they also collaborate with other RCLs to varying degrees, it seems as if there is intentionality for collaboration among the SPS RCs. Besides reflection meetings, RCLs in SPS schools reported that different clubs within schools prepare jointly for competitions. RCLs and volunteers also indicated that they also share resources. Distance between RCs was cited as an impediment to collaboration, even by RCs in urban areas. This suggests that there is scope to strategically promote the establishment of RCs within clusters to enable better collaboration and allow children to choose between many RCs within an area and also to enable RCLs to swap reading resources. Swapping of reading resources and sharing ideas can be done within a fairly large group of RCLs. Within the larger groups, collaboration can be encouraged, through twinning, where RCLs at good and excellent clubs work with RCLs from struggling and developing clubs to improve their quality. In addition to sharing ideas and swapping reading materials, in twinning arrangements, RCLs of stronger clubs can model practice at RCs that are struggling or developing.

4.5.3 Key insights

- 62% of RCs become inactive after the first year and an additional 30% become inactive within 24 months, suggesting that RCs are most vulnerable to closure in their first year.
- Highest attrition of RCs within the first year is among special projects RCs (77%)



compared to 59% core campaign and 50% online registration.

- Online registration clubs seem to show commitment and determination and persistence as they stay active when there is minimal investment in them from Nal'ibali.
- Collaboration may be used to promote longevity of RCs as collaboration between RCLs through sharing ideas, swapping books, and modelling practice s may lead to self-sustaining clubs

4.6 Outcomes of RCs

To determine the outcomes of RCs, the evaluation answered the question: **How, if at all, are reading clubs influencing literacy habits, motivation to read and self-efficacy and confidence of children and adults participating in the reading clubs?** The data to answer this question was gleaned from quantitative and qualitative survey data and site visit data.

In the survey, a rating scale of 1-10 was used to determine perceptions of effectiveness of the Nal'ibali approach as well as the confidence that RCLs have regarding the approach. In relation to effectiveness of the approach, 73% active and 82% inactive RCLs rated the approach as very effective, with 40% active RCLs scoring the approach 7 or 8 and 33% scoring it 9 or 10. Of the 82% of RCLs who believe the approach is effective, 42% scored it 7 or 8 and 40% scored in 9 or 10.

Regarding the RCLs' confidence of the in the Nal'ibali approach, 71% active and 64% inactive RCLs (scoring 7-10) indicated they would encourage someone else to start a RC. Twenty six percent of inactive RCLs indicated that they had encouraged other people to start their own RC, and one RC had been established through this encouragement. Forty five percent of active RCLs have encouraged other people to start a RC, and 38 RCs have been established because of their encouragement.

In the survey, RCLs were asked whether being a leader of a RC had changed them in any way, and 63% active and 44% inactive RCLs indicated that it had. From the survey data, 277 qualitative codes were generated in the analysis of data on the most significant change that had occurred among RCLs as a result of being a RCL. Table 27 shows some profound and far reaching changes that were cited by active RCLs.

Table 28: The most significant change among RCL from running a RC

Effects of RC on RCL	Count
Reading for enjoyment	74
Better relationship with the children	67
Better understanding of children	35
Increased patience with the children	22
Sense of fulfilment	21
Achievement in many new areas	20
Increased confidence levels	13



Effects of RC on RCL	Count
Increased creativity by the children	4
Improved reading/writing skills	1
Total	277

The most significant change with highest frequency, accounting for 27% of the codes, was RCLs reading for enjoyment. Most RCLs indicated that they had no interest in reading at all, but running a club had sparked an interest, and they now enjoy reading. For some, this enjoyment included increasing the repertoire of resources that they read, with one RCL indicating “*before, I was only reading my Bible but now I read even novels*”.

Other significant changes in the table are in line with the qualities that are promoted by Nal’ibali for adults who work with children, and it is positive that being an RCL assisted further in developing patience, understanding and better relationship between adults and children. RCLs also reported getting a great sense of fulfilment from their work in the RCs, knowing they were making a difference in children’s lives.

The sense of personal achievement was also regarded as important by RCLs, and examples cited include:

- Learning new languages and becoming multilingual, necessitated by running clubs where children were multilingual;
- Becoming social change agents and being determined to keep children off the streets and in the RC;
- Expanding their vocabulary through the books they use with the children;
- Being motivated to continue with their education in the case of a few volunteers and RCLs: one of the volunteers also indicated in FG discussions that she was now motivated to study because of the engagement with books at the RC;
- Being motivated to start a school.

In RCL interviews and volunteer and parents FG discussions, more profound changes were cited regarding changes in attitudes towards reading, career aspirations, increase in knowledge and integrating the Nal’ibali approach into the curriculum. A RCL explained how her attitude towards reading and accessing books had shifted because of her exposure to the Nal’ibali programme when she revealed:

Before I was ignoring the books in the shop but now sometimes when I go to Shoprite, I go straight to the books to see what is happening with these celebs and buy the Daily Dispatch [local newspaper] or Move [weekly magazine] so I can know what is happening. I always thought newspapers and magazines were expensive so I never bought them but now I read more and I don’t like watching TV. (Interview with RCL)

For a young RCL, running a RC and working with children fed into his aspirations of becoming a teacher:



It changed me personally. I gained so much interest that one day I would like to achieve my dream of becoming a teacher —a qualified teacher —and also a role model to these children that are motivating me, because sometimes they come and say: ‘Teacher, we wish we were in your class.’ So this motivates me to push hard, so maybe for those who are still growing up, I could be able to teach them. (Interview with RCL)

RCLs and volunteers also acknowledged how reading is enabling them to gain significant knowledge, which is especially important when working with children who are always asking questions and are eager to learn about everything. The following statements highlight the influence of the RCs on knowledge and learning:

The reading club is important because I learn new things myself when reading and being part of the club, I become better and I can develop the children much better as well. (VFG discussion).

Nal’ibali has taught me to read every day, I must just read more. There’s internet here at the library, so I read and research on the internet so that I have more knowledge to work with the children. Nal’ibali has also taught me to be creative and I am constantly thinking of ways to engage children. (Interview with RCL)

The reading club is important to me because I sometimes learn from it. I learn new things that I didn’t know about. Once you take those books you learn new things. Sometimes in the books you gain something new for example when you have children of your own you need to treat them the same way and that is something I learned from a book at the reading club. If I had not read the book, I would not have known that, I would continue to have my favourite child but in the book they say you must love your children equally. (VFG discussion)

A key change is the way in which RCLs who are teachers were reported to be integrating the Nal’ibali approach into their everyday classroom work to improve learning outcomes. A SS reported:

The teachers are conducting everything in reading according to the reading for enjoyment approach and I have noticed that teachers are also using the books in the hanging library. When I go to classrooms and ask children what we are going to read they say Nwel’ezelanga. When I read the story, you can see they know what it is about. Children enjoy it when you read and use actions and keep changing your voice. (Interview with SS)

Even more positive are changes that empower volunteers and parents in terms of their own literacy development and habits, as highlighted by the following quotes:

I couldn’t even write my own name before joining the club and working at the centre. From being required to sign in and out, I then learned to read and write my name. (VFG discussion)

I can now read the bible at church for everyone who cannot read to listen. (VFG discussion)



I used to be lazy to read magazines and newspapers but my daughter has persuaded me to gain an interest now. She'll bring a magazine and ask me to read and ask a lot of questions. (PFG discussion).

Significant changes among children because of the RCs were also reported by RCLs in the survey and in interviews, as well as by volunteers, parents, and children themselves during FG discussions. Table 28 provides an overview of outcomes of the RCs on children, as reported by RCLs in the survey.

Table 29: Changes among children in RCs reported by RCL in the survey

Reported changes among children	Count
Improved learning outcomes	180
Improved confidence levels	152
Improved reading/writing skills	117
Reading for enjoyment	87
Discipline has improved	87
Disposition has changed	74
Knowledge expanding	50
Social relations improving, e.g. making friends	46
Improved communication	45
Increased creativity	23
Total	861

The analysis of survey data generated 861 qualitative codes, and 21% of the codes were about how RCs were regarded as improving learning outcomes. This was supported by parents, volunteers, story sparkers and children, who all indicated that there was a noticeable improvement in the children's performance in class. There were also reports from RCLs, comprising 18% of the qualitative codes, that children's confidence has improved. The general trend is that children join the RC being very shy and as time goes on, develop and exude confidence:

I can say there is change because you notice that children have gained confidence, they are able to tell their own stories in front of an audience, even the young ones in Grade 1 you sometimes hear them saying English words and you ask where did you hear that word and they will tell you the teacher told them because the book is in English and IsiXhosa and that helps them to tell you a word in IsiXhosa and in English. (VFG discussion)

Some children have changed. The ones who were shy can now confidently answer questions. Sometimes I hear other children singing the Nal'ibali song while walking on the street. (VFG discussion)

The growing confidence among the children was observed at site visits where children were confidently reading stories aloud or performing poetry and giving answers to questions when they were discussing the story that had been read. The children also engaged with the researchers very confidently during FG discussions. The following statements from the observation of a RC session illustrate the children's level of confidence:



One of the older children read a story aloud, acting it out, showing others pictures, and asking questions. The child then shut the book and retold the story without the book, in his own words, with such passion. (RC Session observation)

The children read each paragraph of the story together aloud very expressively. The volunteer asked questions after each paragraph, which the children answered with understanding. (RC Session observation)

A noteworthy proportion of the qualitative codes also speak to improvements in writing and reading skills, and this was verified during site visits when children's drawing work posted on walls was observed, and the children themselves testified that they had improved their reading and writing skills. Testimony to reading for enjoyment came from parents, RCLs, volunteers and children themselves, some of them pointing out that reading has a purpose for them and they read in their spare time during the weekend when they are bored. Some RCLs indicated that the children are enjoying reading so much that some of them come to ask for books to read during intervals.

Besides the skills that they are learning in communication, reading and writing, and attributes like confidence, a key feature of RCs is how the stories told are imparting strong values to children, particularly empathy and responsibility. At one of the observed RC sessions, when the RCL was reading a story about a wolf and six little lambs, children made comments like *"these lambs listened to grandmother, but the wolf tricked them, shame"*. The children's responses to the RCL's question about what they would do if they were the lambs also showed a strong identification with the lambs when they said they would have kept quiet so the wolf would not know they were there, or that they would have beaten the wolf up. Children also expressed empathy when they indicated that they do not like certain books in which the characters are evil.

RCLs indicated that there is a growing trend of children taking responsibility for others by assisting their peers, thereby

...motivating and instilling confidence in those who provide it. To those being supported, this makes them feel cared for and loved. When children feel recognised, it makes them want to do better all the time. This is some kind of positive reinforcement. The older children take responsibility for the small ones and support them. There is so much love amongst them. Peer support keeps on improving the quality of all the activities they do. (Interview with RCL)

All in all, the perceived outcomes of RCs on children, volunteers and parents, as articulated in interviews, FG discussions and observations, were wide ranging and largely positive.

4.6.1 Key insights

- Both active and inactive RCLs believe in the effectiveness of the RFE approach and would want to see it disseminated and adopted more widely.
- Some teachers are embedding the RFE in their classroom work.
- Some children indicated that they have become more confident in class as a result



of being encouraged to do so at the RC.

- Some children have become literacy role models who read to their parents who cannot read and some children ask their parents to read them the supplement they take home.
- Volunteers have adopted RFE in their homes.

5 Improving quality and sustaining RCs

This section answers the question: **What are the most effective and cost-effective things that Nal'ibali can do to support quality and sustainability of RCs?**

To answer this question, a synthesis of results from **section 4** is provided to show potential interventions that Nal'ibali can implement to improve quality and promote sustainability across all clubs. A basic cost assessment (i.e. the ingredient method) and feasibility analysis process was undertaken, where resources required to run a RC were identified and actual costs of these obtained from Nal'ibali. This data was used to estimate the total resource cost of running a typical Nal'ibali RC, based on a determination of the cost composition of the various inputs. The input costs were then used to calculate the cost of prospective interventions to support the quality and sustainability of the RCs. The areas that were considered for the costing exercise are establishing RCs, maintaining and improving quality of RCs, and sustaining the RCs. These areas are discussed below in relation to the findings. The cost assumptions presented here are based on the cost of running 4 800 RCs as per Nal'ibali financial records for RCs for the 2018/19 financial year.

5.1 Activities to cost for establishing RCs

The cost analysis considered two aspects in the establishment of RCs: establishing RCs like the ones that currently exist and establishing new RCs for deaf children. Several findings have a bearing on this. For current RCs, the evaluation found that:

- Although training emerges as the greatest catalyst of establishment of RCs relative to the other reasons given in the survey, in absolute terms, not everyone who is trained establishes a RC. Some reading materials are given to people who attend training to start a RC and end up unused if a RC is not established that can utilise these resources. In any case, getting materials from Nal'ibali was not cited as a key reason for starting a RC so provision of expensive materials like story books at the training stage, with the intention that they would be used to start a RC, is not cost effective, although the resources may end up being used in communities.
- Most children are recruited by an adult.
- Parental participation in RCs is largely limited.
- Recruiting volunteers is challenging. Those who are helping do not do so all the time.



- A significant proportion of RCs are run in schools, and 33% of RCLs in the sample were primary school teachers

The following activities are considered for costing for improving quality of RCs at establishment stage:

1. For potential new RCs, the finding in the survey that none of the active RCLs surveyed could have a conversation or read in SASL is significant as it presents a potential new area for Nal'ibali to pilot, namely RCs that use SASL as the RC language. In 2011, 0.5% of the South African population (234 655) spoke SASL.⁴⁶ Literature on literacy for deaf children shows that during the ECD stage (0-3), deaf children do not have adequate support from family and the community who, in most cases, cannot communicate in SASL, and this stalls language acquisition for these children until they reach the formal schooling stage. In the same way that hearing children whose parents read to them develop advanced literacy skills and cope with schooling better, deaf children of deaf parents and with exposure to deaf adults and people who can communicate with them in SASL “have a head start in language acquisition, communication development and educational prowess, and do well in later life as employees, citizens and leaders (DeafSA, 2018). In this regard, based on its foundational principles and ToC, there is a possibility for Nal'ibali to reach deaf children, particularly those from poor communities, and offer them opportunities to engage with text in ways that improve their language development to enable them to cope with learning, succeed in school and increase their life opportunities.
2. Because not all who come for the initial Nal'ibali training start RCs, yet training is a big catalyst to RC formation, it is prudent to continue capitalising on training as a key driver of establishment of RCs but to provide more cost effective resources for people to start RCs and then provide story books and other more costly resources only when RCs have been registered and have been running for a couple of months. The cost analysis considered providing only supplements which cost R3.00 each and read around collections that cost R4.00 as the startup kit for RCs.
3. Given that most RCs are in schools and are being run by primary school teachers and that Nal'ibali has been targeting schools, a long-term strategy could be pursued that could mainstream the RFE approach in ITE. Evidence indicates that a large proportion of newly qualified teachers graduate with no skills to teach reading. A survey found that among 12 education faculties which offer reading instruction to student teachers preparing to teach Sesotho and/or isiZulu, “... only a few of the higher education institutions (HEIs) focus specifically on language literacy and even fewer on teaching reading with comprehension in particular”. Only a few HEIs teach ‘learning to read’, with most focusing on honing already existing reading skills or on advanced reading skills (Posthumous, 2019). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) are working on raising the quality of ITE (DHET, 2017) so that new primary school teachers learn

⁴⁶ Based on 2011 SA Census data



how to teach literacy and mathematics effectively. Most provinces are focusing on improving their reading strategies so that children read for meaning, and an opportunity exists for Nal'ibali to engage providers of teacher education on the possibilities of RFE as an approach to teaching reading. This engagement is difficult to cost and is most likely an opportunity cost. It has therefore not been costed explicitly although the costing assumptions are provided.

5.2 Activities to cost for maintaining and improving the quality of RCs

The evaluation findings point out several things that are required to maintain RCs and improve their quality. These include reading resources and other literacy development resources, and practice that is implemented in RCs. Considering reading resources and other literacy development resources and their bearing on quality, the key findings with implications for the costing are:

- There is inequitable access to reading and other literacy development resources across different types of RCs, with core campaign and special projects RCs better resourced than online registration clubs.
- 37% of all the RCs do not receive Nal'ibali supplements, and 38% of the clubs have less than 10 books of their own.
- There is a scarcity of dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries in RCs.
- In relation to their proximity to RCs, libraries are not being used optimally to augment RC reading resources. Only 46% of active RCLs have library membership, and 56% borrow books from the library (a few without membership probably because the librarians know them).
- Website resources are not being used fully, with only 30% of active RCLs indicating they utilise website content.
- Only clubs that have at least two of the core reading materials (supplement plus own books or library books) fall into the excellent quality clubs category.
- Only clubs that have at least one type of writing material and one type of paper fall into the excellent quality clubs category.
- Only clubs that refresh own books or library books at least every three months fall into the excellent quality clubs category.
- Only 8% of current RCs are meeting at libraries.

Based on these findings, costing for provision of reading resources and other literacy development resources to all clubs was undertaken for supplements and books and for DVDs for deaf children.

Given how access to reading materials and refreshment of reading resources is a significant enabler of excellent quality RCs, three main cost effective strategies can be used to refresh materials:

1. Ramping up the recruitment strategy to increase the number of RCs that meet at libraries, thus addressing both access to reading resources and refreshment of resources;



2. Promoting public library use among RCs so that RCLs can borrow books from the library, hence ensuring constant refreshment of reading resources – also only costing Nal’ibali time; and
3. Promoting collaboration of RCLs around clusters of clubs so that own reading resources are swapped at agreed timeframes to ensure that RCs have ‘new’ resources constantly.

These three strategies utilise Nal’ibali staff time (SSs and LMs) and therefore do not constitute an additional cost to that of personnel.

Regarding practice, key findings with cost implications are:

- Nal’ibali training manuals are not specific about practice that is likely to improve the quality of RCs as the dimensions and thresholds for quality were only defined more explicitly during the evaluation.
- A higher percentage of RCs with an adult:child ratio of 1:15 and under fall into the good and excellent quality club categories.
- RCs that meet for at least 45 minutes each time mostly fall into the good and excellent quality club categories.
- Clubs that meet at least once a week are mostly associated with being good or excellent quality clubs.
- Practice that is associated with good and excellent quality RCs is when core and supporting practice is implemented mostly and always.
- Online training, which is in its infancy, has the potential to provide initial training as well as ongoing just in time refresher training for RCLs who want to brush up on their knowledge.
- Child volunteers do not help much at RCs.

The following proposals apply:

1. Update the training manual to align it with priority practice based on the quality matrix. This cost is covered through Nal’ibali personnel costs as the update will be done in-house, and this is a once off cost as updates will be done on the existing template.
2. Training should be expanded to those who are not currently getting it, and to augment the skills of those who have already been trained but need refresher training, online training should be utilised more. Hiring a moderator for the forum discussions or training someone in house to manage the discussion platforms related to online training should be considered.
3. Training for pilot SASL RCs should be provided.
4. To achieve quality through maintaining an ideal adult: child ratio of 1:15 and under, given the challenge of recruiting community members as volunteers, older children can be incentivised to assist with activities in RCs.

5.3 Activities to cost for sustaining RCs

Evaluation findings with cost implications for sustainability are:

- More than two thirds of RCs become inactive after a year.



- Lack of Nal'ibali support constitutes a significant reason for club inactivity.
- Volunteerism is difficult to sustain when unemployment levels are high.
- The sustainability of special projects RCs that receive weekly SS visits is threatened when Nal'ibali withdraws support from schools when the project term has ended.
- RCLs believe support from Nal'ibali, parents, the community and volunteers will result in RC sustainability.

The costed elements for promoting RC sustainability are cross cutting, with some of the costs for establishing RCs and for promoting quality, for example, recruiting parents and people working with children, advocating for RCLs to be at libraries, providing supplements, books and dictionaries are already costed as contributing significantly to sustainability.

While a cost containment measure for ensuring sustainability includes making use of salaried people to establish RCs, for example, library and ECD practitioners or teachers where the matter of getting a stipend from Nal'ibali is not an issue because they are paid by their organisation, RCs cannot all be entirely affiliated to organisations as this could exclude children who do not belong to those organisations. As such, community volunteers will always be an important part of the Nal'ibali network. Yet having volunteers who are unemployed threatens sustainability as some volunteers stop running RCs when they find employment or experience challenges such as lack of money for transport to get to a club if the clubs are not in their communities.

1. A potential solution to the stipends for volunteers who run their own clubs or support RCLs is getting their stipends paid through national government community employment programmes like the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Works Programme (CWP). Another option that can be explored through partnerships is approaching the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) to explore if some volunteers working in crèches can be funded on a learnership so that they can earn a qualification and a stipend while assisting at a RC. The RC would become the workplace for the work-based component of the learnership. Another prospect is for Nal'ibali is to inform the colleges that offer ECD qualifications as occupational programmes of the prospect of doing their workplace learning at a Nal'ibali network crèche. This way, the assistants would be paid a stipend as part of the workplace-based component of their training. The latter two suggestions depend, of course, on whether the crèches would be willing to host student teachers, which they are most likely to do because of the extra help that comes with having an assistant in class. However, these two suggested solutions will only work with qualified ECD practitioners who would be required to mentor the teaching assistants. The cost to Nal'ibali of negotiating partnerships that could see volunteers getting paid stipends is senior management time for high level engagement. The other monetary costs are difficult to establish and so costing assumptions only have been presented
2. Another cost-effective intervention that Nal'ibali can employ is developing an endorsement letter template for volunteers to support their employment seeking endeavours while at the same time using training to discuss strategies for coping with changes in personal



circumstances while running a RC. An endorsement letter could also be developed for RCLs who want to approach local businesses and organisations for reading materials, fruit, chips and sweets for children. However, the risks of these endorsement letters must be considered.

- Given the large numbers of RCs in special projects that join and become inactive when Na'ibali support is withdrawn, costing has been done to prolong the support to RCs by SSs post intervention programme, but at reduced capacity. The cost of two monitoring visits per club per year by SSs, augmented by telephone support is considered.

5.4 Costed interventions to improve quality and sustainability

In summary, the cost components for establishing RCs and improving their quality and sustainability are reflected in Figure 31.

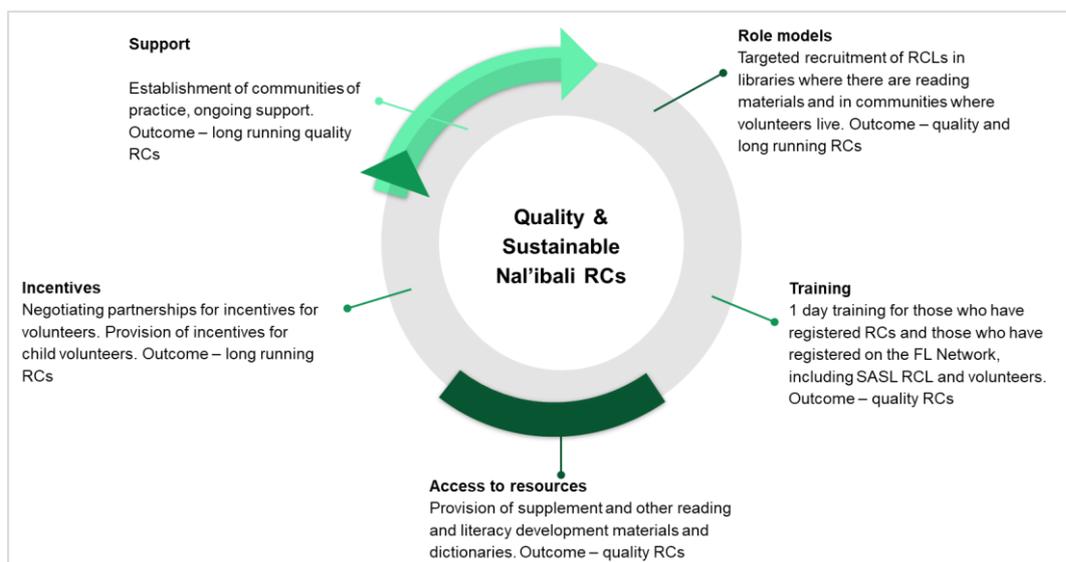


Figure 31: Cost components for interventions to establish RCs and promote quality and sustainability

The following costs are covered by Na'ibali personnel costs as they will be undertaken by Na'ibali paid staff members:

- Focused recruitment strategy in libraries, crèches, schools and organisations that work with children;
- Encouraging sharing of resources among RCs supported by LMs and SSs;
- Partnering with libraries to promote use of libraries by RCLs and to negotiate tokens for RCLs to print stories from the website;
- Developing reference letters for volunteers to assist them with finding work.



Costs that have a direct cash value are presented in the Table 29. The cost assumptions for each intervention are given, and the interventions are prioritised in order of urgency from 1 - immediate implementation, 2 - intermediate implementation, to 3 - longer term consideration.



Table 30: Cost estimates for quality and sustainability of RCs

Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Training	Training potential RCL	R1 654.00	1	Full training cost incurred by Nal'ibali at cost of training in Nal'ibali cost data	Training is associated with good and excellent clubs. This training will capacitate committed RCLs to run RCs effectively and improve sustainability. The training can draw on experiences of RC in the two months they have been running a club to give concrete guidance.
Resources	Supplements for startup kit for RC	R90.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R3.00 Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	Home language resource that has stories that can be used to start RCs. Children can have a resource to handle and enjoy at the new club.
	Read Aloud Collections for startup kit for RC	R120.00	1	Assuming that 30 are given per course participant and each supplement costs R4.00. Quantities can be adjusted to 15 or 20	New resource with stories to increase diversity and quantity of reading resources at the newly established club.
Communication	Communication	R3.42	1	The total annual budget for SMSs based on 4 800 Nal'ibali clubs is R16 412. If this is divided by 4 800 clubs it gives us R3.42 per reading club	For ongoing support to RCs that have indicated they are feeling neglected and gathering information from RCs on whether they have supplements so they can be included on the distribution list if they do not have supplements.
Reading resources	Supplements for registered clubs	R1 350.00	1	Assuming 30 supplements per club for 15 editions @ R3.00/supplement	Critical resource in children's home languages which is being taken home and being read to parents by some children. Supplements help with providing access to reading resources in homes.
	Story books	R600.00	1	10 story books per club per year@ R60.00/story book	Provides additional and diverse resources to RCs. There are very low quantities of story books according to RCLs.
	Bilingual dictionaries	R232.00	3	A basic bilingual dictionary costs R116.00 and 2 will be supplied to each RC	Useful to have, but can be sourced elsewhere. A high proportion of RCs do not have them.
Other literacy development materials	Paper, crayons, and other writing materials	R200.00	1	Fixed amount of R200.00/club, based on Nal'ibali's calculations	Lack of this material limits implementation of interpretive actions which support practice - 30% RCs do not meet the threshold. Having these materials will help promote quality in this dimension.



Component	Activity/Resource	Cost per club/year	Prioritisation	Assumptions	Motivation from findings
Knowledge support to RCLs	Online training	R6.15	1	Based on the premise that a moderator/facilitator is needed for online training so that discussions are guided into learning sessions; It will also provide an opportunity for RCLs who have urgent queries to engage with a Nal'ibali staff member for guidance. This has been costed @R554.00/day for 12 months for ongoing support for 2 160 clubs	There is a demand for training mentioned in requests for Nal'ibali support, and online training reduces training costs. It can also provide ongoing knowledge support to RCLs who need to refresh their knowledge.
RCL session support RCLs	Child volunteers	R350.00	1	Assuming each club has a maximum of 5 children helping, and t-shirts cost R70.00 each	43 (78%) child volunteers in the 55 RCs with child volunteers never assist. T-shirts would acknowledge them as assistants and make them assist more. This is critical as 32 (39%) RCs do not meet the adult:child threshold.
Monitoring and support	Stipends for SSs	R894.00	1	Full cost of a SS per year per club divided by 52 weeks x2 is R144.00 plus the cost of transport @ R750.00/RC/year	Currently, SS run RCs become inactive when SS contracts end and a third to two thirds of school run RCs also become inactive when SSs leave. Having SSs provide continuous limited support after programme exit may help ensure sustainability.
Total cost of activities to improve quality and sustainability		R5 499.57			



Two long term strategies for improving quality and sustainability that can also be considered by Nal'ibali which are difficult to cost are:

1. Engaging ITE providers to embed the RFE approach in their teacher education curricula based on the reports that many ITE providers do not train trainee teachers how to teach reading. An assumption is that the cost of this strategy would be partly avoided costs of Nal'ibali senior staff time to develop the value proposition and presentation and facilitate a workshop, as well direct catering costs for delegates at R150 per delegate. The actual cost would depend on whether Nal'ibali wants to test the feasibility of this with Western Cape providers initially or whether they would want to open it more widely to all ITE providers.
2. Engaging government departments who work on community development and employment programmes to raise funding for stipends for volunteers would also require avoided cost of developing the value proposition and presentation by senior staff members. The direct costs would come from several return flights to Pretoria for negotiations as well as time used for follow ups, based on the assumption that each return flight costs R5 000/per person.

The total cost of improving quality and sustainability for a RC is R5 499.57

Piloting SASL RCs is costed separately as it will be a separate cost item from the costs above. The cost for this pilot would be training and materials for the children as highlighted in Table 30.

Table 31: Costs of piloting 10 SASL RCs

Cost component	Total cost per annum per RC	Assumptions
Training	R2 854.00	We assume that the normal cost of Nal'ibali training of R1 654 is applicable and have added the cost of 2 interpreters @R3 000.00/day each x 2 days of training divided by 10 clubs which is R1 200 each to make R6 000.00
Reading resources	R2 500.00	10 SASL DVD book @ R250.00 each based on price sourced from a sign language development organisation that has developed DVDs.
	R600.00	10 picture books estimated at R60.00/book
Total	R5 954.00	



6 Conclusion and recommendations

Notwithstanding the sustainability challenges being experienced by RCs, the clubs have, to a significant extent, achieved their intended purpose of creating role models who have established RCs where children go willingly to enjoy reading. Reported outcomes are largely positive, and more can still be done to improve all areas of RCs. The findings differentiated clubs by project, and Nal'ibali will keep focusing on the projects they do, with findings of the evaluation informing some of this work. The recommendations presented here are meant to improve all clubs. Based on the findings of this evaluation, we recommend the following:

6.1 Recommendations for establishment of RCs

1. Continue to focus recruitment strategy towards people who work with children and in places like libraries that have resources, given the scarcity of reading resources among clubs.
2. To reduce high costs of materials at initial training, offer starter kits of up to 30 supplements and read out collections to each trainee who wants start a RC.
3. Given the high inactivity of clubs in the first year, establish buddy system that links up RCLs in geographic clusters to enable easy collaboration between RCLs in a way that will enable children and RCLs to be aware of RCs within a specific area so that children can join another RC in their community if their RC shuts down.
4. Given that some RCLs have indicated that they have successfully embedded it into their classrooms, engage providers of ITE and in-service training to discuss the mainstreaming of the RFE approach to teaching reading. If this gets any traction, the approach will be used in many schools and crèches.
5. Consider piloting RCs with 10 organisations working with deaf children or with schools for the deaf to extend the reach of the RFE and RCs by introducing a new language and also addressing the needs of marginalised, poor deaf children.

6.2 Recommendations for access to reading materials

6. Given the large proportions of RCs without supplements, improve targeting and delivery of supplements to RCs.
7. Based on the limited quantities of reading resources in RCs, continue the practice of sending a pack of 10 story books to new reading clubs, and extend it as a once off to all active clubs. Aim for diverse packs that can be swapped while considering economies of scale. Provide a set of 10 story books.
8. Because website stories are being underutilised, and there are very few reading resources for children to independently engage with text, negotiate partnerships with city libraries to provide printing tokens to RCLs to print website stories from the library.
9. To pilot SASL RCs, provide a set of 10 different SASL DVD and story books to each pilot SASL site. Provide different sets that will enable swapping that leads to refreshment of resources at agreed times.



6.3 Recommendations for practice

10. Update the *Module 3 manual Run a reading club* in line with the quality matrix to specify quality dimensions and thresholds.
11. To provide ongoing training support, investigate blended learning to try and address the knowledge needs of RCLs in a core sustainable way.
12. Align the RC theory of change with the quality matrix.
13. Appoint a moderator/facilitator for online training or reskill internal capacity to moderate discussions on the online module platform. A SS may be best placed to do this.

6.4 Recommendations for quality

14. Given that writing and drawing now form part of the quality matrix and Nal'ibali does not provide drawing and writing resources, consider provide writing and drawing materials for supporting practice.
15. Promote active involvement of RCLs in the established buddy system so that they can also swap books as a way of refreshing their reading resources.
16. Arrange bi-annual monitoring and support visits by SSs to special projects RCs that have graduated from the project.
17. Continue using various forms of communication like SMS, phone, email, WhatsApp and newsletters to reach out to clubs and support them – all clubs.

6.5 Recommendations for sustainability

18. To help raise the quality of struggling and developing clubs, consider twinning RCLs from good and excellent clubs with those from struggling and developing clubs for tip sharing, encouragement and where possible, distance and resources permitting, modelling of ideal practice.
19. Build on past experience on this to negotiate possibilities for volunteer stipends with Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Community Works Programme (CWP), Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education Training Authority (SETA).

6.6 Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

20. Because adult volunteers do not assist always at RCs, Nal'ibali should include a question on the frequency of adult volunteers' assistance at clubs in their monitoring tool or surveys to improve understanding of the actual adult:child ratios at clubs.
21. The high variance between survey and monitoring data on clubs that meet weekly or 2-3 times a week warrants closer attention to monitoring data for these options to establish causes of variance.
22. In future research, clear distinction needs to be made on what is referred by library as school libraries and community libraries can be conflated in responses as seemed to be the case in the survey.



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Appendix: Visual mapping of how good and excellent clubs meet dimension thresholds

